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ABSTRACT

Essentialism is a trimmed down, action-oriented, user-friendly approach to Total Quality Management (TQM) in education. This book explores the concept of essentialism to describe strategies for implementing TQM in community colleges. Chapter 1 examines the history of the TQM movement and reviews experiences of community college practitioners involved in continuous quality initiatives. Chapter 2 discusses management theories and change, TQM's pioneers, and the importance of TQM in community colleges. Chapter 3 explains the two guiding principles of essentialism, constancy of purpose and consumer satisfaction, while chapter 4 reviews the theory's three basic elements: accept regulatory requirements; attend to current customer needs; and anticipate the needs of future customers. Chapter 5 describes four essential elements to create a receptive environment for implementing essentialism, including strategic planning that continuously renews the college mission, environmental planning, leadership, and support for empowered teams and individuals. Chapter 6 describes the use of such traditional TQM tools as flow charts, Pareto charts, and fishbone diagrams, while chapter 7 presents eight new tools, including stairsteps analysis of the number of steps in a given goal; wallpapering, or a physical display of all paperwork necessary in a process on a wall; and the repetitive "why." Chapter 8 examines implementation strategies including teambuilding, project selection, and common pitfalls, while the final chapter summarizes the principles and elements of essentialism and suggests that since few colleges have the human and financial resources necessary to implement a full-blown TQM plan, essentialism provides a viable alternative. (Contains 57 references.) (KP)

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ESSENTIALISM:

COMMON SENSE QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

By
Desna L. Wallin
and
Jon R. Ryan

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Foreword

A community college is not a factory, and its product—education—is not as tangible as a car or a microchip. Total quality management can be transferred from an industry setting to an educational institution. But at what price?

In October 1993, Horine, Hailey, and Rubach summarized the results of a survey of 139 universities and thirty-six community colleges with the following statement:

> Across the country, colleges and universities are reporting successes gained through applying TQM principles. There are reports of increased employee empowerment, customer satisfaction, teamwork, and cultural change. However, institutions are noting that managing continuous improvement requires a willingness to change and a considerable amount of time and training (1993, p. 41).

For the past few years, I have been speaking to groups around the United States about implementing total quality management in higher education. I've talked about the history of the quality movement, what the experts say, and how to get started. I've talked about how TQM is a magnet pulling in the best parts from management theories, human resource development concepts, systems theory, and statistical analysis. And I've talked about some of the positive differences that TQM can create within a college. I have proclaimed that TQM can work in community colleges.

But the reality is that it's not working everywhere. Here are some of the common complaints and laments I hear:

"TQM implementation takes time—lots of time. And, after spending lots of time, you learn one thing—it takes even more time!"

"We never seem to actually do anything—we just get more training!"

"The college is trying to measure everything; what will we do with these statistics and numbers?"

"We put a lot of effort into working on improving small pieces of insignificant processes. Nothing important really changes."

In *Essentialism: Common Sense Quality Improvement,* Desna Wallin and Jon Ryan have zeroed in on these common pitfalls in implementing TQM in community colleges. Recognizing that limited resources keep many institutions from fully implementing TQM, Wallin and Ryan have provided an easy-to-understand, practical approach that will allow community colleges to reap the benefits from TQM without breaking the budget or burning out the employees. Their simplified version of TQM, which can be integrated into the ongoing activities of a college, can be implemented without expensive consultants and years of preparing to get started. Their approach is very straightforward: focus on the primary business of the college, meet the needs of current and future customers, and accept regulatory constraints. Add to this strategic planning, an environment of leadership and empowerment, and a handful of tools, and you have Essentialism.

We are years away from fully understanding what changes TQM in higher education will bring about. However, by incorporating the principles and elements of Essentialism, we can ensure that all community colleges—no matter what their size or wealth—will be able to participate in the transformation.

Linda Thor
President
Rio Salado Community College, Arizona

Preface

Writing is like putting. Short and straight is best; long and curving is undesirable." So says Philip Crosby in his classic work, *Quality is Free* (1979, p. 150). We agree wholeheartedly!

This book, like Essentialism itself, is intended to be short, straight, and to the point. We begin by looking at the quality movement and its history. We look at what is wrong with current conceptions of total quality management, as well as what is right. We review the experiences of practitioners—those in community colleges who are currently involved in continuous quality improvement initiatives. The first chapter sets the stage for *Essentialism: Common Sense Quality Improvement.*

Chapter Two raises the question, "Why Quality?" and discusses management theories and change, TQM's pioneers, and the importance of quality in the community college. Chapter Three presents the "Two Guiding Principles" of Essentialism: constancy of purpose and customer satisfaction. Chapter Four reviews the theory's "Three Basic Elements": accept regulatory requirements, attend to the needs of current customers, and anticipate the needs of future customers.

In Chapter Five, we examine "An Environment for Essentialism," including strategic planning, environmental scanning, leadership, empowerment, and faculty roles. Chapter Six, "Traditional TQM Tools," explains in simple terms several of the basic traditional tools of TQM, such as flow charts, Pareto charts, and fishbone diagrams. Chapter Seven, "New Tools for Essentialism," presents eight new quality tools, including the repetitive "why," stairstepping, and wallpapering.

In Chapter Eight, "Implementing Essentialism," we practice what we preach—we examine actual implementation strategies that include teambuilding, project selection, and common pitfalls to avoid. Chapter Nine summarizes the principles and elements of Essentialism and their importance to the community college.

Every college needs to think about quality and continuous improvement. Few colleges are capable of expending the time, effort, and human and financial resources necessary to implement a full-blown, industrial-model total quality management program. Essentialism provides a viable alternative, a meaningful quality choice for the community college.

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We have had many great conversations with our own faculty and staff as well as with colleagues across the country who have shared their experiences and added immeasurably to this book. We are particularly indebted to the Continuous Quality Improvement Network (CQIN) colleges, which have banded together to share their expertise in quality initiatives and to provide national leadership in quality improvement. A special thanks to Linda Thor of Rio Salado Community College, who has openly shared both triumphs and failures with us. We must also recognize our many associates from business and industry who have inspired and advised us.

Bonnie Gardner and Ron Stanley of AACC publications provided valuable advice and insight. Without their assistance and encouragement, the idea of Essentialism would not have gone beyond a presentation or two at professional conferences. David Pierce, president and CEO of AACC, offered early encouragement to embark on this task.

Finally, we are grateful for the competence, criticism, and organization of our assistants, Anne Schmidt and Tina Petersen.

Essentialism: Common Sense Quality Improvement has been a genuine team effort.

In a time of drastic change, it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists. (Eric Hoffer, quoted in Bennis, 1989, p. 189)

CHAPTER ONE

COMMON SENSE QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Why another book on total quality management? Interest in total quality management (TQM) and its spinoffs—total quality improvement (TQI), continuous quality improvement (CQI), continuous quality education (CQE), continuous quality assurance (CQA), and quality education management (QEM)—has increased exponentially in the last decade. We have been bombarded with success stories, admonitions, self-styled gurus, and expensive quality workshops. But the veneer is beginning to crack. Businesses that have earned the coveted Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award have filed for bankruptcy court protection. Quality departments have been cut drastically or eliminated. And many astute business leaders are questioning whether the gains justify the expenditures and extra hassle. All this when educational institutions are just beginning to take TQM seriously!

Total quality management and its variations in name and approach have recently become targets for scathing criticism. The process has earned innumerable supporters and participating organizations, but it has also generated many naysayers and disappointed users. The critics often make references to "another buzz word," "old wine in new bottles," and "just another fad, soon to be gone." There are also more substantive arguments regarding the efficacy of TQM, indicating that it is too cumbersome and expensive to initiate, that it does not really improve the bottom line, that it is industry (especially product manufacturing) based, that it requires an incredible amount of personnel time, and that it simply cannot be done with the resources available at a community college.

The Public Sector

Government and education are relative newcomers to the quality movement. An article in the *Washington Post* describes TQM as first being introduced to the federal bureaucracy in reform initiatives undertaken during the Reagan era. "Now with the Gore report, management is being once again asked to help make the federal government run as lean and mean as a Lexus, as reliably as a Sony, as innovatively as a Panasonic, and as cheaply as a Suzuki" (Garreau, 1993, p. A25). Although over two-thirds of government agencies claim to be on the quality track, not everyone is convinced that TQM has sufficient merit to justify the enormous costs. "There are so many consultants vetted to spread the TQM faith throughout the federal government that that industry alone is worth $50 million a year and burgeoning" (Garreau, 1993, P. A25).

Many critics are quick to point out the time and effort required for so-called quality management and are reluctant to make the enormous commitment that is asked. Leonard Weiss, staff director of the State Government Officers Committee sums up a common belief when he states, "To me it's just plain old-fashioned logic and common sense. More has been made of it as a philosophy than is there. Nothing about it is terribly deep" (Garreau, 1993, p. A25).

Education

Education, like government, has jumped onto the TQM bandwagon relatively recently. With the exception of Oregon State University; the University of Chicago; Delaware County Community College, Pennsylvania; Fox Valley Technical College, Wisconsin; Rio Salado College, Arizona; and a handful of others, most educational institutions are in the early investigation or implementation stages. In January 1994 the authors surveyed 587 community colleges to determine the extent of their interest and experience with total quality management or similar initiatives. The colleges surveyed were those with an FTE (full-time equivalency) of 2,500 or less. These colleges were most likely to have limited resources with which to address their quality needs through external consultants and programs. Over 33 percent responded to the survey. As anticipated, respondents expressed a basically positive attitude toward the concepts of TQM but had serious reservations concerning time, costs, and commitment. Many considered TQM just another fad, the management equivalent of a Baskin-Robbins Ice Cream "Flavor of the Week." Several respondents indicated that TQM was too complicated. Some indicated it was merely "hot air." Another saw TQM as "just more of the same old stuff, stirred and rewarmed." And yet, in addition to the skepticism, there was also a clear desire for improvement. Comments from the survey include: "better decisions, greater institutional support;" "excellent approach, some of which we have been doing;" and "I believe it has benefits for all; it is an excellent organizing point." Marissa Polono, president of Harcum Junior College, Pennsylvania, maintains, "This is a great way to get people involved and committed to serving students. It gives people a sense of commitment and allows for their voices to be heard."

Many reflect a common frustration—knowing enough about TQM principles to believe the application would be useful to their organization, yet restrained by limited fiscal and human resources. Such comments as "worthwhile, but very time consuming initially to implement" and "fear of change and fear of extra work" appear repeatedly.

Gail Rogus Rice, president of North Country Community College, New York, reveals similar concern: "I am in favor of TQM/CQI programs and am particularly interested in a scaled-down version." Clifton Paderi, president of Sampson Community College, North Carolina, states, "We are planning a pared-down version. We would like to have the full program, but it's beyond our resources."

Along similar lines, Donald C. Burns, president of Montcalm Community College, Michigan, maintains, "I believe the TQM/CQI process is a reasonable method for increasing knowledge and fostering institutional improvement. The drawbacks of such a program are the time and resources necessary to initiate and maintain it." Ron MacDonald, president of Kilian Community College, South Dakota, agrees: "For a small college, with people wearing different hats, TQM as currently presented is too complex and too expensive. When a

TQM system is specifically designed for small colleges, we will take another hard look at it."

And perhaps the most telling comment of all—as colleges both large and small attempt to cope with the demands on their staff, faculty, and administrative resources—comes from Kent Farnsworth, president of Crowder College, Missouri: "Small institutions with lean administrative groups have everyone doing double or triple duty as it is. We see the many values of a TQM-type cooperative problem-solving approach, but need to phase into it rather than use an immersion method. We also already use many of the participative techniques related to TQM, but need some help in finding that umbrella that brings them together in a cohesive whole."

There can be no question that our college resources, especially our human resources, are particularly limited. Juliet Schor's book *The Overworked American* gives scholarly credence to what we all feel. "According to my estimates," she writes, "the average employed person is now on the job an additional 163 hours, or the equivalent of an extra month a year" (1991, p. 20). If we group the major causes of the concerns that can plague TQM activities, we find they can be characterized by four common complaints:

- TQM is too complex
- TQM is too costly, in both money and time
- TQM takes too long, with no immediate results
- TQM diverts resources and attention from other organizational needs

Too often, an organization finds the complaints overpowering. The result is either an ineffective program that can cause more harm than good or an unwillingness to even attempt TQM. Many of the college leaders we heard from expressed fear that a TQM program was too costly and time consuming to even consider.

For many colleges with limited financial and human resources, a full-blown, long-term, high-profile TQM program is nearly impossible to accomplish. Our collegiate propensity to formalize and organize our activities means that TQM is often practiced not as a process of continuous improvement but as a bureaucracy seeking self-continuation.

Oren Harari notes that when an organization begins a TQM project, "It is natural to build an orderly, predictable bureaucracy around it. Of course, we don't call it a bureaucracy; we merely create reams of paper and sign-offs, a formal hierarchy of councils and committees, a plethora of meetings and techniques that must be adhered to, and a steadily growing staff that does little but monitor—some would say 'police'—it all" (1993, p. 34).

Florida Light and Power, often noted as an example of a company that TQM helped win the 1989 Malcolm Baldrige Award, has found its program too complex and costly with too little return. "As one outsider remarked, people seemed more interested in the appearance of quality and jumping through the internal TQM hoops than on quality itself" (Harari, 1993, p. 34).

Because community colleges often operate with more than one location, have instructors who are both full-time and part-time, and, in most of their efforts, construct and offer services, not goods, they have found it difficult to apply full-blown TQM. Joining faculty, maintenance staff, and business services into a single committee that strives to identify and solve significant problems is in itself a difficult task. Establishing oversight facilitators and resource persons, creating libraries, sending off benchmarking teams and generating reports to "everyone who needs to know," means one more bureaucratic system becomes formalized. In the name of quality, it has become common to produce quantity.

This can generate significant demands on financial resources. Time away from regular work, materials and resources, meals and refreshments for training sessions, and, in most cases, the cost of an outside consultant, quickly add up. Because budgets almost always are constrained at community colleges, expenditures with no visible and immediate result are very hard to justify. Unfortunately, favorable results are not necessarily immediate. Because TQM can guarantee neither savings in operations nor an immediate improvement in the bottom line, the impetus to draw upon limited funds is severely restricted. Proponents of TQM regularly repeat that TQM is a process, not an end in itself. Philip Crosby, one of the gurus of the quality movement, says that "it takes four or five years to get people to understand the need for, and learn to have confidence in, an improvement program" (1979, p. 10). However, financial imperatives often demand that improvements be fiscally rewarding—and within the current budget year.

The complexity of traditional TQM, if offered institutionwide with 100 percent employee participation, guarantees that few, if any, projects can be successfully begun and completed in a single year. Too often, to ensure that no one feels left out, or to guarantee acceptance by the "loyal opposition," or to be certain that doable projects are selected, a TQM effort drags on and on, and tangible results become very hard to identify.

In fact, Oregon State University, with one of the early successful TQM applications in an educational setting, gives this grim description of what to expect in the implementation of TQM: "Implementation of TQM takes a long commitment (five years), a lot of time (up to 20 percent), and costs money (at least 60K/year)" (Coate, 1990, p. 38). No wonder most community colleges are cautious as they attempt to evaluate what TQM can do for them. Very few of us have the capabilities or resources of an Oregon State University, yet we know that quality is an imperative.

One of the most difficult tasks of educational institutions, as we attempt to adapt TQM, is to make it both appropriate and user friendly. Philip Crosby stated it well: "If you work hard enough, you can make quality management difficult" (Faulkner, 1993, p. 2).

No wonder, then, that administrators, staff and faculty alike bemoan the loss of any time to a quality improvement program. Because TQM requires initial training and countless meetings to identify problems and select projects, participants can experience overload.

Those who fault total quality management usually discuss TQM's failure to achieve desired results or failures of process or perceived low cost/benefit ratios. They do not fault an organization's desire to achieve quality. As Tracy Benson writes, "In most cases, failed quality programs are not the result of failed *quality*. . . . [but] are instead the result of the way TQM has been applied" (1993, p. 16).

Essentialism

Those concerns are specifically the focus of this book. The search for quality has become too complex, too expensive, too time consuming, and too laden with consultants and how-to videos. And yet the search for quality is imperative for all educational institutions, large and small.

It has become increasingly common to hear TQM lambasted as just another fad, a new buzz word, a current consulting opportunity. Also, many argue—with some legitimacy—that TQM is really just old-fashioned shared governance, customer service, or good basic management principles. The list of what TQM consists of that is *not* new could go on for pages. And there are innumerable variations of currently practiced TQM across the nation. In fact, we admit, Essentialism is one more variation!

This book advocates and explains a new approach to quality, a user-friendly approach. It details—in a step-by-step fashion—a trimmed-down, firmed-up, action-oriented TQM that is appropriate to our proactive institutions and cognizant of our limited financial and human resources. It is divested of unnecessary peripherals. It is a bare-bones, doable quality improvement process. It strips away the unnecessary and distracting frills and goes to the heart of our core activities and core mission. It is Essentialism.

Essentialism: that which is necessary and indispensable. Essentialism is defining and attending to our core activities and functions. It is examining each new process critically and examining old processes with a willingness to give up old ways of doing things. It is an ability to look at change in a positive, open way. It is reevaluating the mission statement to make sure core activities match the mission. Essentialism is a practical, pragmatic, action-oriented alternative to traditional total quality management. Essentialism is the quality initiative most appropriate to community colleges with their diverse missions, scarce resources, and emphasis on service.

Quality is an eternal struggle. "Good enough" is simply not good enough. There is always a better way, a simpler approach, a more elegant solution (Seymour, 1992, p. 58)

CHAPTER TWO

WHY QUALITY?

Though it is hard to imagine anyone arguing that quality is not a necessary part of any organization or activity, some people suggest that too much is being made of "this quality thing." Their argument rests largely upon the high cost and wasted effort of expensive, mammoth, and ill-run quality improvement efforts. But there is a great difference between the implementation of total quality management and the actual value of quality in the goods and services produced by a college or business. "Quality is a thoroughly pragmatic, dollars and cents approach to management that, done honestly and diligently, will increase productivity and lower costs. It is not some esoteric, philosophical debating subject like beauty and true justice, although too often it is treated as if it were" (Dobyns, 1991, p. 275).

By whatever means an organization attempts to achieve continuous quality improvement, there can be little doubt of the need to constantly seek greater quality for several compelling reasons including competition, accountability, increased expectations of external customers, and the need to properly serve internal customers. First, the competitive environment of today's educational and business world demands greater quality and constant improvement of products and services.

> It is apparent that conditions exist in education similar to those that caused business leaders to apply TQM in industry. Competitive pressures are increasing, new areas of emphasis are developing, enrollments are under pressure, the demand for improved effectiveness is getting stronger, and higher costs are forcing an examination of alternatives by both schools and prospective students. Changes in educational technology are accelerating as is the pace of technological change in our global economy, all resulting in the need for continuous and rapid change in programs offered by educational institutions (Gore, 1993, p. 355).

Students—whether they are of traditional age in traditional programs or adult industrial workers participating in an on-site training program—recognize the need for quality in the classroom and quality in the auxiliary services of the college. Our customers are more aware, more demanding, more beset by our competition. If our colleges are to survive, we must please our customers—present and potential—or we will lose them to alternative education providers that are willing and able to not only meet but exceed their expectations.

> The Quality philosophy follows a simple rule: The first priority of an enterprise and everyone in it must be knowing and satisfying the customer. This is not sloganeering; it is common sense. In a competitive environment, if you don't satisfy the customer, someone else will (Seymour, 1992, p. 14).

Any given institution has competitors—direct or indirect or both—and failing to serve its customers well will mean loss of revenue, loss of public support, and loss of credibility in the community. For many colleges, it is more often a question of survival than a question of success when measures of quality are applied. As Tom

Peters often states, if you are not a quality-driven organization today, you will be gone tomorrow. Quality no longer means being particularly attractive to customers or particularly financially or organizationally successful. Quality today is the very basis for survival.

Survival depends on accountability, the second compelling reason for quality efforts. There is increasing pressure from state legislatures, the federal government, and local taxing bodies to improve the delivery and the results of our educational systems. Assessment of student outcomes is of growing interest to all levels of government as well as oversight agencies and accrediting boards.

> The plain fact is that the accountability push has been a light switch that has caused many organizations to illuminate their concern for quality (Seymour, 1992, p. 6).

Closely tied to accountability, and a principal motivator in the demand for accountability, is the shrinking resource base that plagues entities that depend on tax revenues. There simply are insufficient funds to provide for the needs of our community colleges. Altered circumstances—a U.S. economy faced with global competition, changed demographics, drugs and violence, and changing social values—have forced community colleges to offer more while working with less.

> The realities of changing demographics, the increasing demands of expanding technology, and a faltering public education system have caught America—and, certainly, its community colleges—between a rock and hard place. While facing these new realities, colleges must continue to struggle to reduce barriers to higher education and to develop a curriculum to meet expanding personal, economic, and societal needs, even as they wrestle with more limited budgets, facilities, and equipment (Roueche, 1993, p. 18).

Such change creates extraordinary demands on our society as a whole and publicly funded institutions in particular. The demand for greater services with better results, funded with fewer dollars, means that every activity and effort within our colleges must provide exceptional value. In short, offering more for less is now the expected standard.

> Across the country, belt tightening is now the rule in the public sector as the growth rate of tax revenues drops and services are shifted from the federal government to state and local levels. States, cities, and universities all hear the same cry: "Do more with less!" They are asked to maintain or even increase productivity in spite of budget and staff cuts. How can we cope with this pressure? One answer may lie in the total quality movement (Oregon State University, 1990, pp. 2–3).

Essentialism enables a college to provide quality improvement of real value, with tangible results emerging quickly, with a minimum of expenditure and maximum utilization of in-house skills—the employees, managers, and leaders actively involved in the institution. Essentialism ensures that a college can meet the extraordinary demands placed upon it. Quality enhancement means greater productivity with less expense. "It appears that education has 'hit the wall.' State budgetary crises have forced large reductions in allocations to higher education, resulting in unprecedented increases in tuition, laying off of tenured faculty members, abolition of entire academic programs, and restriction in admission of students. Even those draconian measures, however, are not enough. Deeper cuts are required, and higher quality is demanded" (Cross, 1993, p. 104).

A third compelling factor in the need to offer ever-improving quality is the growing expectation by the public and our immediate customers that our colleges will offer exceptional service above and beyond the quality of a "product." That is, the delivery of a particular product or service is enhanced or undermined by the way it is offered or by the individual who offers it.

Thus, one of Essentialism's values is its stripping away of the unnecessary, valueless, repetitive, unproductive actions employees and managers spend much of their day performing. "Administrivia" will strangle a person's initiative, devour time to do work of real value, and hobble initiative. The time of all college employees, from janitor to dean, is valuable, especially in today's resource-short environment. *The Overworked American* struck a responsive chord across the country with its revealing study of the great maximization of work and minimization of leisure time that plague Americans today. Author Juliet Schor argues: "For many, the workday rivals those for which the 'satanic mills' of the Industrial Revolution grew justly infamous: twelve- or fourteen-hour stretches of labor" (1991, p. 20).

And it is not just managers whose days are filled; all of the college's faculty and staff feel tremendous time pressures. No wonder then that financial aid officers and receptionists and bookstore staff are sometimes less than courteous to both internal and external customers.

It is imperative to focus on providing the right means of delivery as well as the right results of delivery. "Thank you" and "please," common courtesy, and a sincere smile are important parts of that delivery. Perhaps it sounds simplistic—almost like something Mary Poppins would say. But we all know how we feel toward an organization when its employees are rude and indifferent. Our colleges are no different than any other organization. As James Swiss, writing of public employees in government, has noted, "the consumer will evaluate the service not only on the results but also on the behavior and even the appearance of the person delivering it" (1992, p. 358).

David Seymour underscores the importance of the style of the service provider. He quotes a Ford executive:

> When we got down to specifics, we discovered that roughly 60% of our customers' satisfaction with our products could be attributed to the vehicles themselves—their quality, reliability, ride, fuel economy and so on. The remaining 40% of how well customers were satisfied depended on how they were treated during the sales and service experience at the dealership.

"The point," Seymour concludes, "of course, is that satisfying the customer's technical requirements is simply a prerequisite to staying in business. The consumer wants more, much more" (1992, p. 7).

A fourth reason for quality in the college revolves around the internal customer. In addition to minimizing frustration and anger for co-workers, a quality effort enables co-workers to develop a sense of mission, group cohesiveness, and directed, value-added effort that may have been lacking in the past. At the very least, all employees will feel that work conditions are improved and real successes have been achieved, if Essentialism is correctly implemented. Stripping away the unnecessary from our demands on fellow workers; freeing up valuable time by reducing paperwork, meetings, and reports; working as teams empowered, authorized, and supported in efforts to improve processes; being able to expend energy on valuable efforts and see real results—all of these processes enable and encourage us. As internal customers discover the value of results-driven Essentialism, they will become both better providers and better customers.

> The logic is, then, that every person in an organization is both a producer and a consumer. In your role as a consumer, wouldn't you like the producer to present you with a perfect product or service? Would that make your job easier—more enjoyable, more rewarding? Now picture a whole series of need-satisfying producer/consumer linkages throughout your organization. That's quality (Seymour, 1992, p. 13).

That's why quality is important to the community college, why quality is more than a fad or a current buzz word. Regardless of the means we use to inculcate quality in all that we do, there can be no argument that quality is necessary to the success and continuation of an organization. A college can no longer ignore the wants and needs of its external customers and internal customers. The demands of the new world around us require commitment to quality in all that we do.

> The status quo has been challenged. Conditions have changed. Demands are different. The bar is being raised to a new standard with greater expectations and an increasing unwillingness to tolerate ordinary performances. The motivation is now clear. Either respond to the call for quality or step aside because others will be more than happy to move to the front of the line (Seymour, 1992, p. 8).

What influences have brought business and industry, government, and education to consider total quality management and other quality initiatives? What changes have necessitated institutions of all kinds to consider quality as an imperative?

Management Theories and Change

Without a doubt, we are living in a time of rapid and often chaotic change. Political changes are accelerating. New countries are formed overnight; old ones disappear. Social and demographic changes place additional burdens on our institutions. Technological changes challenge our ability to cope with an ever-increasing deluge of information. Information technologies, in particular, are exploding in ways difficult to comprehend. It is said that if the automobile industry had developed as rapidly as the processing capacity of the computer, we would now be able to buy a 400-mile-per-gallon Rolls-Royce for about $2.50. This change is both quantitatively and qualitatively different from the incremental change of the past; Charles Handy (1989) labels it "discontinuous change." He argues that things are not going to go on working as they have been working, whether we like it or not.

The old ways of predicting, modeling, and planning do not serve as well as they once did. The rational theories of management and bureaucratic order developed by Frederick Taylor, Max Weber, and others no longer seem to be applicable in the current chaotic environment in which business, government, and education must operate.

Joseph Juran, another quality leader, maintains that while people have always wished for quality, over the centuries they have faced various challenges resulting in the need to continually change strategies to ensure that quality. The current chaotic environment in which we work requires increasing sophistication in determining what strategies are important (Juran, 1989, p. 1).

Before human history began, as primitive peoples gathered food, hunted, and used rough tools, the quality strategy in force was simple inspection. Are the berries ripe? Are they poisonous? Is the meat fresh? How can we preserve it? Are the arrows sharp and true? Is the club effective?

The division of labor was simple and efficient. Women would gather; men would hunt. Each acted as both suppliers and customers to each other. As villages formed, craft workers materialized. These individuals could make the best boots, or the best weapons, or the best wheels. Quality was achieved by individual expertise; soon the entire village knew where they could obtain the best boots—those that would both fit well and last for a long time.

As the guilds arose, particularly in Europe, customers began taking specifications to suppliers. Measurements became standardized as did certain basic processes. Certain members of the guilds became widely recognized as producing quality items.

As the individual business became a reality, and factories became more common, written specifications became common. Standardization was the norm (Juran, 1989, pp. 2–3). The beginnings of the assembly line materialized. Management evolved to the point where it could be taught—it was even referred to as the science of management.

> Late in the nineteenth century the U.S. broke sharply with European tradition by adopting the Taylor system of "scientific management." Central to the Taylor system was the concept of separating planning from execution. This separation made possible a considerable increase in productivity. It also dealt a crippling blow to the concept of craftsmanship. In addition, the new emphasis on productivity had a negative effect on quality. To restore the balance, the factory managers adopted a new strategy: a central inspection department, headed by a chief inspector (Juran, 1989, p. 4).

As the Industrial Revolution evolved, responsibility for quality became diffuse. Unlike the days of the craft shops in which the master oversaw quality, the separation of planning and operations negated individual responsibility. Ultimately, as the twentieth century brought an explosive growth in both number and complexity of goods and services, the quality function became ever more remote from the workers (Juran, 1989, pp. 12–13).

Frederick Taylor's scientific management, aimed primarily at lowering the cost of factory production, gained credence and was implemented obsessively in the years from about 1910 through 1935—the period that has become known as the classical era of organizational theory. Taylor's ideas led to time and motion studies and rigid discipline on the job (Owen, 1981, p. 50).

Frederick Taylor began his book *The Principles of Scientific Management* by quoting President Theodore Roosevelt's address to governors at the White House: "The conservation of our national resources is only preliminary to the larger questions of national efficiency" (Taylor, 1911, p. 5). One of Taylor's primary purposes in writing the book was "to prove that the best management is a true science, resting upon clearly defined laws, rules, and principles, as a foundation" (p. 7).

And thus began the long quest for efficiency in management that Frederick Taylor pioneered. Taylor's work exerted tremendous influence on the development of the quality movement in the last half of the twentieth century.

Taylor's contemporary in Germany, Max Weber, began defining and studying bureaucracy as a theory of organization especially suited to the needs of the new and increasingly complex organizations coming out of the Industrial Revolution. The mid-1930s through the 1950s saw the flowering of the human relations movement in management.

In 1956 Armand Feigenbaum first proposed the idea that quality didn't happen in isolation. Rather, he maintained: "The underlying principle of this total quality view . . . is that, to provide genuine effectiveness, control must start with the design of the product and end only when the product has been placed in the hands of a customer who remains satisfied. . . . The first principle to recognize is that quality is everybody's job" (Garvin, 1988, p. 13).

Inasmuch as quality was perceived as everybody's job, this period emphasized human and interpersonal factors. The 1950s and 1960s saw an effort to combine two seemingly incompatible systems—classical management and human relations management. Discussions revolved around Theory X (associated with classical management), "the average person inherently dislikes work and will avoid it whenever possible," and Theory Y (associated with the human relations school), "if it is satisfying to them, employees will view work as natural and as acceptable as play," (Owen, 1981, p. 50). By this time, responsibility for quality had come to rest in isolated departments of quality assurance or quality control. In the 1970s we saw the new interest in Japanese management, quality circles, and Theory Z, which stipulated that involved workers were the key to productivity (Ouchi, 1981). Concerns about quality, then, are nothing new.

David A. Garvin maintains that the contemporary quality movement has actually had a long history, dating back at least a century. He divided the quality movement in the United States into four distinct eras: inspection, statistical quality control, quality assurance, and strategic quality management (1988, p. 3).

The management theory in vogue today is TQM—total quality management. TQM seems to have elements of classical management and human relations management—Theory X and Theory Y—combined with a liberal dose of Theory Z. The truly new piece in TQM is the advocacy of genuine empowerment. If TQM can be "walked" as well as it is "talked," we may finally have a leadership breakthrough.

Inflexibility, unresponsiveness, the absence of customer focus, an obsession with activity rather than result, bureaucratic paralysis, lack of innovation, high overhead—these are the legacies of one hundred years of American industrial leadership. These characteristics are not new; they have not suddenly appeared. They have been present all along. It is just that until recently, American companies didn't have to worry much about them. If costs were high, they could be passed on to the customers. If customers were dissatisfied, they had nowhere else to turn. If new products were slow in coming, customers would wait. The important managerial job was to manage growth, and the rest didn't matter. Now that growth has flattened out, the rest matters a great deal (Hammer and Champy, 1993, p. 30).

Growth for many community colleges has also flattened out; if we are to grow we must attract new customers—and please them. Today, dissatisfied customers have other options.

The Distinctions of Culture

Thomas H. Davenport, in his book *Process Innovation: Reengineering Work Through Information Technology,* argues that there is an essential difference between American culture and that of the Japanese and Germans that makes process improvement and incremental change difficult for Americans. Both American business and education have long been rewarded for their flashy, front-page innovations. There seems to be little reward, or notoriety, for gradual improvement. "Yet in the American business culture—noted for an emphasis on large, exciting change and visible results—a process orientation that shows results thinking may meet substantial resistance" (Davenport, 1993, p. 312).

Indeed, some Japanese firms, and the quality experts whose precepts they follow, have emphasized process over result. To the quality faithful, if the process is managed, the result takes care of itself. "The focus of total quality management remains as making continuous improvement. . . . The desired level of change is incremental. . . . The possibility of radical process innovation . . . was admitted, sometimes grudgingly, by a few quality experts, but only when it occurred within a continuous improvement context" (Davenport, 1993, p. 321).

Masaahi Amai—quoted in *Process Innovation*—maintains that the idea of slow and gradual improvement is contrary to American culture:

> Japanese companies generally favor the gradualist approach and Western companies the great-leap approach—an approach epitomized by the term innovation. Western management worships at the altar of innovation. This innovation is seen as major changes in the wake of technological breakthroughs, or the introduction of the latest management concepts or production techniques. Innovation is dramatic, a real attention-getter. Kaizen [continuous improvement] on the other hand, is often undramatic and subtle, and its results are seldom immediately visible. While Kaizen is a continuous process, innovation is generally a one-shot phenomenon (Davenport, 1993, pp. 312–313).

Another concept making recent headlines in the business world is that of *reengineering*.

> Reengineering capitalizes on the same characteristics that have traditionally made Americans such great business innovators: individualism, self-reliance, a willingness to accept risk, and a propensity for change. Business reengineering, unlike management philosophies that would have "us" become more like "them," doesn't try to change the behavior of American workers and managers. Instead, it takes advantage of American talents and unleashes American ingenuity.
>
> At the heart of business reengineering lies the notion of discontinuous thinking—identifying and abandoning the outdated rules and fundamental assumptions that underlie current business operations. Every company is replete with implicit rules left over from earlier decades (Davenport, 1993, p. 3).

And every educational institution has its set of archaic rules and regulations. These had a reason for being at one time, but they now serve as barriers to creativity, innovation, continuous improvement, and quality.

By embarking in a public way on a continuous quality improvement program, educators, like their colleagues in business, are harking back to their usual mode of doing business, with its attendant hype. They are making a public great-leap into another new management activity. They are being innovative! After the luster of the grand announcement, the forming and "blessing" of teams, and the much-touted early successes, it is difficult to continue low-key, gradual improvement over a long period of time. It is simply too much of a contrast to the established American way!

TQM's Pioneers

Three names have become synonymous with the quality movement—W. Edwards Deming, Joseph Juran, and Philip Crosby. While these three pioneers have certain philosophical similarities, they each champion a specific ideal of quality.

Deming is perhaps the most familiar name to the casual student of total quality management. Shortly before his death in December 1993, he wrote, "The trouble with Total Quality Management—failure of TQM, you call it, is that there is no such thing. It is a buzzword. I have never used the term, as it carries no meaning" ("Report Card on TQM," 1994, p. 22). This from the father of the quality movement!

Iowa born, Deming grew up in poverty in Wyoming. He was a tenacious student and went on to earn a doctorate at Yale in mathematical physics. He spent most of his early career as a statistician training workers in the U.S. Census Bureau. In 1947 he was invited as a statistical consultant to help prepare Japan for its 1951 census. In 1950 he was asked by the Union of Japanese Scientists and Engineers to give a series of lectures regarding the use of statistical measures to improve the quality of its products. The Japanese were convinced, and they went on to become a symbol for quality and dependability. Deming was not actually "discovered" in the United States until he was interviewed for a television documentary aired on June 24, 1980. He became an instant celebrity. Industry and business were seeking to become more competitive in an increasingly difficult global market. Deming "began giving four-day workshops with flow charts, fishbone diagrams, Pareto charts, and histograms—meanwhile excoriating American administrators and managers, who he charged were lazy, weak, unwilling to lead, and more worried about their jobs and financial deals than they were about producing goods and services of high quality" (Keller, 1992, p. 49).

The second of the pioneers of TQM is Joseph Juran. Juran had emigrated from Romania to Minnesota when he was eight years old. Juran, an engineering school graduate, became a quality inspector at the Western Electric Hawthorne Plant in Chicago in the 1920s. Juran, like Deming, became a consultant to the Japanese and later, in 1979, opened his own Quality Institute. His major contribution to total quality management is the emphasis on paying attention to customer satisfaction. He also stresses the value of teamwork and the need for planning, control, and constant improvement (Keller, 1994, p. 49).

The third pioneer is Philip Crosby. His background is as a reliability engineer for Martin Marietta and ITT. In 1979 he published a best-selling book, *Quality is Free,* which catapulted him to eminence in the quality movement. He has established quality schools internationally. His emphasis is prevention of defects through thorough training and good management (Keller, 1992, p. 49). "Crosby defines quality as conformance to requirement. He believes the system of quality is prevention—appraisal is done now, not later. He encourages a performance standard of zero defects and says that measuring quality is the price of non-conformance—doing something over rather than doing it right the first time" (Cornesky, 1991, p. 38).

These pioneers of the quality movement, both in America and internationally, all worked within the framework of business and industry. They did not propose their systems for the public sector. Many within education maintain that total quality management and continuous quality improvement are industry models that are not in any way applicable to education. Some forward-looking educational institutions, however, did see opportunities for educational improvement through TQM.

Total Quality in Community Colleges

Delaware County Community College, Pennsylvania, and Fox Valley Technical College, Wisconsin, were among the early leaders in total quality in the community college. They both began their formal work in 1986 and used the Crosby model as their primary guide. The starting place for both was in providing training for business and industry; they then went to applications in their own service areas. Only now are both considering how to implement TQM on the academic side.

Other community colleges involved in early formalized quality efforts include Hawkeye Institute of Technology, Iowa; Jackson Community College, Michigan; Lamar Community College, Colorado; Palm Beach Community College, Florida; and St. Augustine Technical Center, Florida.

In early 1993, a group of community colleges pioneering in continuous quality improvement efforts sought to improve their access and understanding of CQI by banding together into a consortium. The consortium is aptly named CQIN, the Continuous Quality Improvement Network. Participating community colleges include:

Bakersfield College, California
Brazosport College, Texas
Cowley County Community College, Kansas
Dallas County Community College District, Texas
Delaware County Community College, Pennsylvania
Eastern Iowa Community College District, Iowa
El Camino College, California
Fox Valley Technical College, Wisconsin
Grand Rapids Community College, Michigan
Harford Community College, Maryland
Houston Community College System, Texas
Howard Community College, Maryland
Jackson Community College, Michigan
Joliet Junior College, Illinois
Lakeshore Technical College, Wisconsin
Lamar Community College, Colorado
North Central Technical College, Wisconsin
Rio Salado Community College, Arizona
Washtenaw Community College, Michigan
West Virginia Northern Community College, West Virginia

Clearly, there is a growing interest and involvement in formal quality improvement efforts among community colleges throughout the country.

If we look at the processes of education, they are all aimed at continuous improvement. We in community colleges accept our students as they are, add value through teaching and support services, and evaluate and assess improvements. Lawrence Sherr and Gregory Lazier, writing in *Total Quality Management in Higher Education,* summarize the concept of continuous improvement in education: "What is education itself—our core mission—but continuous improvement through learning? Surely we want to endorse that idea as a description not only of our educational goal but also of our organizations as a whole" (1991, p. 10).

Yet TQM is different as applied to higher education than when applied to industry. TQM as currently marketed and practiced is overly complex and cumbersome. It is difficult, particularly for smaller colleges, to commit the time and resources necessary for a full-blown TQM program. The common sense quality improvement approach most appropriate for community colleges deals only with what is basic and indispensable to the college and its mission. Essentialism provides a framework of guiding principles, basic elements, and practical tools accessible to any community college wanting to continually improve its programs and services to meet the needs and expectations of its diverse customers.

It's time for the American quality movement to advance from . . . evangelism to . . . pragmatic, focused action (Terrence R. Ozan, quoted in Yates, 1992, p. 1).

CHAPTER THREE

TWO GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Essentialism: that which is basic or indispensable. Determine and pursue what is essential to the success of the college. Simplify, simplify, simplify! And focus!

TQM as currently marketed by an endless string of quality gurus is the antithesis of Essentialism. Current practices in TQM go far beyond what is basic or indispensable. On the contrary, in many cases it has become an add-on activity, with new mountains of paperwork and a TQM bureaucracy. An *Industry Week* article on author Michael Spendolini zeroes in on one such misguided effort in TQM:

> Companies have been known to assign as many as 25 or 30 people to benchmarking teams—and then "create roles in order to give everybody something to do." Among the roles that Dr. Spendolini has encountered are: sergeant-at-arms, flip-chart specialist, morale officer, and fitness coach. "In the company with the

> fitness coach," he says, "every benchmarking team meeting began with 30 minutes of exercise" (Sheridan, 1993, p. 30).

Essentialism does not mandate a flip-chart specialist or a fitness coach. Quite the contrary, Essentialism urges us to stick to the basics, keep it simple, and apply the two guiding principles of Essentialism:

- Constancy of Purpose
- Customer Satisfaction

Constancy of Purpose

W. Edwards Deming, the recognized father of quality management programs, became known for his success in bringing the Japanese economy from the brink of destruction at the end of World War II to one of the most productive in the world. While his new management techniques, with their emphasis on reducing variation and attending to customers' needs and expectations, were ignored in the United States, he became revered in Japan. Within a very short span of time, "made in Japan" changed from a symbol of junk to a symbol of quality and dependability. Only after feeling the pinch from Japanese competition did the United States begin to search out the applicability of total quality management to business, industry, and, much more recently, to education.

Deming maintained that quality could be built around fourteen points. These fourteen points constituted a whole new way of doing business—a new management philosophy. His first point, and the one around which all the others revolve, is as follows: "Create constancy of purpose toward improvement of product and service, with the aim to become competitive and to stay in business, and to provide jobs" (Deming, 1986, p. 23). According to Charles F. Bonser, writing in *Public Administration Review*, "Deming believes most organizations are characterized today by a lack of constancy of purpose. False starts and a focus on short-run output is endemic" (1992, p. 507). Community colleges often have the same short-term mentality as American business, emphasizing student numbers, credit-hour production, and less-than-visionary leadership.

Trudy Banta, writing in response to a letter critical of TQM in education, summarizes the reality of any genuine quality improvement effort: "Concern about managing for quality is a way of life. It's not for short-term gain" (1993, p. 8). Constancy of purpose keeps the longer view always at the forefront. Constancy of purpose provides a solid foundation for all activities—it is the mission of the institution.

Constancy of purpose requires management to pay attention to the problems of today, tomorrow, and the transition. An important aspect of constancy of purpose is the development of a statement of the aim of the organization. Organizations without an aim will not do well (Latzko, 1991).

It is the mission statement that provides constancy of purpose. A clearly defined mission statement, one that is well known and understood throughout the organization, will ensure Deming's constancy of purpose. Everything we do, every program we initiate, every service we offer, every quality effort must go back to the mission statement.

The Mission Statement

Constancy of purpose provides a focus for all the activities of an organization. For a community college, constancy of purpose should be embedded in the college mission statement. The mission statement should answer three questions:

- What do you do?
- Why?
- For whom?

As we look to launch a quality initiative, we must examine that initiative from the vantage point of the mission statement. Why should we spend an enormous amount of time and effort attempting to do extraordinarily well what we shouldn't be doing at all?

Contrary to the many detractors who maintain that TQM has no applicability to service organizations, nonprofits, and education, Peter Drucker maintains that quality concepts are indeed applicable to nonprofit organizations, including most colleges and universities. "As a rule, nonprofits are more money conscious than business enterprises are. They talk and worry about money much of the time because it is so hard to raise and because they always have so much less of it than they need. But nonprofits do not base their strategy on money, nor do they make it the center of their plans, as so many corporate executives do. . . . The nonprofits start with the performance of their mission" (1992, p. 205).

Thus, any quality improvement program undertaken by a community college should reinforce the mission statement—the constancy of purpose that binds an institution together. As we look at services and products to improve, we must be sure that those services and products are an integral part of the college mission.

Essentialism and the College Mission

Community colleges by their very nature are a diverse group. Depending upon state charter, university relationships, geographic location, and local/regional governmental entities, they may have quite different emphases from state to state. Thus their mission statements should reflect that uniqueness. However, the majority of community colleges that purport to be comprehensive community colleges have five basic components that should be reflected in some way in their mission statements. These functions provide Deming's constancy of purpose for the organization.

- *Transfer function.* Students should be able to obtain the first two years of an undergraduate education that results in an associate degree that is easily transferable.
- *Occupational / technical function.* Students should have access to high-quality technical training that leads to specific and immediate employment upon completion of the program.
- *Developmental function.* Many students at the community college are unprepared for the rigors of college work. Many have been out of school for a number of years or did not pursue academic subjects while in high school. They need the opportunity to bring their skills to the level at which they will succeed in college-level course work.
- *Community education function.* Many of our constituents need short-term training in computer skills, office skills, or similar areas. Or they may have an interest in various personal improvement programs. We should be able to offer course work designed to meet—and exceed—their needs and expectations.
- *Economic development function.* Our colleges can only be strong if our communities are strong. As proactive community organizations, we must be prepared to respond to needs for customized training, apprenticeship and co-op opportunities, and promotional activities to attract and retain business and industry.

With these components in mind, take a specific example of a college mission. Eastern Iowa Community College is a multicollege district of approximately 8,000 FTE covering 2,644 square miles and serving a population of approximately 290,000. The college mission states: "The Eastern Iowa Community College District strives to provide accessible quality educational programs and services which anticipate and respond to personal and community needs and expectations. These efforts will reflect an active commitment to excellence, to lifelong learning and to cooperation with all segments of the community."

Examining the mission statement more closely, we see that it does meet the criteria for a viable mission statement.

- *What do you do?* Eastern Iowa Community College District provides accessible quality educational programs and services
- *Why?* To anticipate and respond to personal and community needs and expectations
- *For whom?* All segments of the community

Any quality initiative, then, must both reinforce and complement the mission statement if we are to maintain constancy of purpose. It must not be an add-on activity; rather it should enhance those commitments we have made to our various constituencies. Constancy of purpose, as exhibited in the mission statement, is the first guiding principle of Essentialism.

There's nothing more important to achieving a quality institution than a well-developed, comprehensive mission statement from which all activities of the institution emanate. Starting with the mission and its requirements, according to Peter Drucker,

> may be the first lesson business can learn from successful nonprofits. It focuses the organization on action. It defines the specific strategies needed to attain the crucial goals. It creates a disciplined organization. It alone can prevent the most common degenerative disease of organizations, especially large ones: splintering their always limited resources on things that are 'interesting' or look 'profitable' rather than concentrating them on a very small number of productive efforts (1992, p. 205).

Customer Satisfaction

Not only is it imperative to maintain constancy of purpose, we must also be sure we are satisfying our customers. Many in education are reluctant to accept the notion of students as customers. Yet students are the "purchasers" of the services we "sell." Whether we choose to call these purchasers customers, consumers, students, or learners is probably irrelevant. If we are to be successful in the long run, we need to apply the second guiding principle of Essentialism, customer satisfaction.

Clifford Peterson, in his monograph that describes adaptations of TQM for community colleges, maintains that:

> Juran's emphasis on determining who the customers are and what their needs are may at first seem foreign to the community college environment. However, although the word "customer" does not adequately describe the clientele of a college or university, Juran's definition of a customer as "anyone internal or external to the organization" is readily applicable to higher education. Therefore, quality assurance in a community college requires a determination of the educational needs of students, alumni, faculty, staff, and the community as a whole (1993, p. 21).

One commonly held definition of a quality organization is one that meets or exceeds customer needs and expectations. If we accept that quality is largely determined by customers, then by definition a quality college meets or exceeds customer needs and expectations.

Customers, of course, are not limited to students. We can make the distinction between internal and external customers. Internal customers include those who are dependent on us for information to do their jobs properly. Faculty, support staff, administrators, and board members are all customers. Hammer and Champy observed, in relation to internal customers, "We found that many tasks that employees performed had nothing at all to do with meeting customer needs. . . . Many tasks were done simply to satisfy the internal demands of the company's own organization" (1993, p. 4). Clearly, we need to be sure that what we ask of employees is meaningful to those we serve and adds value to the organization. Their needs and expectations must be met—if not exceeded.

Let's distinguish between needs and expectations. If the weather is cold and snowy outside, I *need* a coat. I need something very basic to provide warmth and protection against the elements. That is what I really need! But is that all I expect? No! As a reasonably savvy consumer, I expect the coat to be well made, to last for more than one winter. I expect it to be somewhat attractive—both sleeves should be of the same fabric and pattern, for example. I don't need that to stay warm, but I expect something a little more. Based on my satisfaction, the extent to which my expectations have been met or exceeded, I'll decide whether my next coat will be the same brand or whether I will search for something that better meets my needs and expectations.

If I'm traveling, and I stay at a motel for the night, all I really *need* is a bed and bathroom. But I expect much more—attractive surroundings, T.V. (probably cable as well), security, telephone, room service, etc. And whether or not I choose to stop at this particular motel again largely depends upon how well my expectations are met—or exceeded.

Our students are not all that different as customers or learners. They need a learning experience, a credential, but they expect much more: employment, successful transfer, new job skills, etc.

Academics will often argue that satisfying students—meeting or exceeding their needs and expectations—is a simple matter—give everyone "A"s! At first blush, that may seem to be customer satisfaction, but let's look a little more closely. What do students really want? What are their needs and expectations? W. Edwards Deming has been quoted as saying: "Pay attention to the *ultimate* customer. Lead him. You have to tell him what he's going to need three to five years from now, then have it ready. He cannot tell you" (Keller, 1992, p. 51).

Those who have enrolled in community college technical/vocational/occupational programs have one basic objective—they want jobs when they finish their program. Obviously, if they are to be hired in an increasingly competitive job market, they need appropriate skills and experience. A high placement rate will bring customer satisfaction. They need to finish a program, to gain a diploma or degree, to gain specific job skills. How do we *exceed* those needs and expectations? Outstanding faculty, state-of-the-art equipment, co-op work experiences, successful placement! Exceeding needs and expectations provides satisfied customers and employers. The college's reputation is enhanced, and continued success is likely.

What about students in our liberal arts/transfer programs? What do they want? They want to succeed when they transfer to a university or four-year college. They need the associate degree to transfer. They expect a smooth transition; they expect to be prepared for the academic demands at junior and senior level work. They expect rigorous course work and careful assessment to enable them to succeed when they transfer.

Just how do customers determine quality? A Gallup survey conducted in 1988 asked the question, How do you determine the quality of services rather than products? The top four determinants were, in order: 1) courteous, polite treatment; 2) promptness; 3) satisfy your needs; and 4) attitude of personnel (Spanbauer, 1992, p. 40). Students, as customers, are constantly evaluating programs and services to determine if we are, indeed, providing quality.

If we are to meet and exceed the expectations of our customers, we need to focus on narrowly targeted "speedboat" issues, rather than "battleship" objectives. John Sheridan suggests that battleship issues are so broad that they overextend the authority of individuals on a team. The end product is often no more than a report that immediately begins to collect dust. Speedboat issues are focused on small, noticeable changes that will make a difference to customers (1993, p. 30). We need to focus on the specifics that are important to customers—courtesy, promptness, a helpful attitude. This is particularly true with community colleges, which operate in an unusually dynamic and diverse environment. The community college operates in a setting much like that described by Rosabeth Moss Kanter:

> I often tell people that it's like the croquet game in "Alice in Wonderland." That's a game in which nothing remains stable for very long; everything is in constant motion around the players. So Alice tries to hit the ball, but the mallet she's using is a flamingo, and just as she's about to hit the ball, the flamingo lifts its head and looks in another direction, which I think is a perfect image for technology, for the tools we use. Just as one set has been mastered, there's another set facing in still another direction that requires adaptation, learning, change, a flexible attitude, the ability to incorporate new knowledge, work differently with suppliers, and so forth (Dobyns and Crawford-Mason, 1991, pp. 140–141).

As comprehensive community colleges, we have many customers. Business and industry clients, community education learners, international students, remedial and developmental students—the list goes on and on. If we're to produce truly satisfied customers, we need to exceed their needs and expectations. We must first determine what their needs and expectations are and conscientiously work not only to meet, but to exceed those needs and expectations. Customer satisfaction, the second guiding principle of Essentialism, will enhance our reputation today and assure us that we will be in business tomorrow.

The two guiding principles of Essentialism—constancy of purpose and customer satisfaction—provide the lens through which we view any proposed TQM-like quality program. As we examine potential quality initiatives, we must continually trim away what is extraneous to our purpose. We must constantly be searching for ways not only to meet, but to exceed, our learners' needs and expectations. The two guiding principles provide the foundation for any quality improvement effort. With a thorough understanding of the college mission, and a desire to ensure customer satisfaction, we are ready to move from the two guiding principles to the three basic elements of Essentialism.

It is easy to plant a big garden; hard to tend it (Scholtes, 1992, p. 1-14).

CHAPTER FOUR

THREE BASIC ELEMENTS

John Hartley, chairman and CEO of Harris Corporation, in delivering a speech to the 21st Century University Conference, admonished those in attendance to "refocus on the mission and consider reinventing the institution to pursue that mission most effectively. Some hard questions need to be asked: 'What values sustain this institution? Can we continue to be all things to all people?'" (Hartley, 1993, pp. 337–339).

Can we continue to be all things to all people? is a question community college leaders and faculty find themselves asking frequently. Particularly in a time of increasing expectations and decreasing resources, a reexamination of mission is in order. But once we are satisfied with that mission, we come to the conclusion that while we can't be all things to all people, the nature of our institutions suggest that we must have *something* for everyone. We are, after all, the community's college—and that means everyone in the community.

When we examine our organizations closely, we find that most of our services, curricula, and activities did not develop in a logical, orderly, linear fashion. Rather, as state or federal mandates came down we added certain processes, paperwork, and personnel. In fact, the majority of what we do today is far different from what we did twenty years ago in the same institutions. If we look closely, we find that most activities within the organization have been added to, patched up, overgrown, disassembled, and reassembled over the years so that any single department or activity is most likely a cobbled-together mutant that bears little if any resemblance to the function it was originally designed to perform. Like Topsy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* many of our functions "just growed."

To remedy these unfocused efforts, improve quality, enhance employee morale and increase real productivity, we must focus on the three basic elements of Essentialism. Those elements are:

- Accepting and complying with regulatory requirements
- Attending to the needs and expectations of current customers
- Anticipating the needs and expectations of future customers

Depending upon the size of the college and the resources available, it may be that a mammoth training program, extensive internal public relations, and applications for quality awards are not essential; in fact, such activities may actually *impair* the search for quality if they are a diversion from core activities—those activities embedded in the mission statement.

Similarly, attempting to inject quality into processes that shouldn't even be done, to achieve results that aren't needed or wanted, is a common result of misapplied TQM. Why do well what you shouldn't be doing at all? is a question too often left unasked and unanswered.

To strip the college's efforts to the bare bones of those things that actively promote its mission and create a quality improvement program that really works, we must concentrate on the three basic elements of Essentialism.

Accepting and Complying with Regulatory Requirements

Complying with the regulatory requirements of funding sources and oversight agencies is by definition essential. To avoid legal action, to insure sufficient funding, to maintain accreditation and certification, we must as an organization do many things. Accrediting agencies provide an appropriate example. All community colleges fall under the jurisdiction of a regional accrediting agency. Periodically a college must prepare an extensive self-study, attending to specified criteria for a successful institution as detailed by the regional accrediting association. The college may disagree with some of those criteria; nevertheless, if the college intends to maintain its accredited status, it must demonstrate adherence to those criteria. If a college chooses to ignore the demands of accrediting agencies, it will soon find itself ineligible for federal or state monies, including student financial aid. It really has no choice; it must meet the requirements of various state and regional accrediting bodies if it is to remain in business.

Frequently a college is required to take on new (and unfunded) responsibilities from the state or federal government. For example, colleges were surprised by the all-encompassing requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Many institutions, even those that had always considered themselves to be very accessible to physically challenged constituencies, found themselves unprepared to meet all the requirements, not only for accessibility but also for adaptive technology—making computers, laboratories, and machinery adaptable to the particular needs of people with various disabilities.

While few would argue that ADA should not have been enacted, there are virtually no institutions that are not feeling tremendous financial impact as a result of the act. Yet, to ignore the requirements of the act is not only socially unacceptable, it is also illegal. Therefore, regardless of our institutions' resources—or lack thereof—every college must make substantial progress toward removing barriers to accessibility. It is the law!

In addition to accrediting agencies and federal mandates, states also periodically unleash a flood of regulatory requirements on colleges. As many institutions are at least partially state funded, they may ignore those mandates at the peril of their institutional health. In recent years, legislators have become more active in the affairs of community colleges. It is not uncommon for states to expect uniform curricula, regular external program evaluation procedures, and specific accountability measures. While colleges may find these requirements intrusive and burdensome, they have little recourse, short of lobbying efforts, but to accede to those state requirements.

The first basic element, then, of Essentialism is accepting regulatory requirements. Not only must we accept those requirements, but we should attempt to perform the functions required of us in a timely, accurate fashion. We should expect no less of ourselves than a quality job of accepting and complying with regulatory requirements.

Attending to Current Customers

The second basic element of Essentialism is attending to the needs and expectations of current customers. Every effort should be expended on meeting or exceeding customer expectations—one of the standard definitions of TQM. Bringing back again and again a satisfied customer is essential to the success of a community college.

Just who are those customers, anyway? Juran defines customers in simple, essential terms. A customer is "anyone who is impacted by the product or process. Customers may be external or internal" (1989, p. 357). A quality institution recognizes a wide variety of customers, external and internal. Whether the customer is an individual in a classroom, a casual attendee at college functions, a donor, a vendor, or a business using consulting and training assistance, it is vital to a college's credibility and financial well-being to meet or exceed the customer's needs and expectations. While students are the primary customers of an educational institution, they are certainly not the only customers.

> It is important to recognize that everyone in the organization is both a supplier and a customer. As a supplier you serve both external and internal customers; as an internal customer, you are served by other suppliers within the organization. If anyone does a bad job, the next person must either rework the task, send it back to have it done all over again, or, worse yet, pass it on to the next internal customer. Any of these actions typically results in increased costs and lower quality. Customer focus requires that we know who our internal customers are, whether we are satisfying their needs, and whether we can satisfy them better (Sherr and Lozier, 1991, p. 8).

There are very real academic applications of internal customer focus as well as the more common business applications. For example, what happens when an instructor who teaches Composition II receives a student who was poorly prepared in Composition I? Exactly the same thing that happens when the purchasing agent neglects to record the complete specs for a new piece of equipment! Rework—or accept a lower-quality product. The faculty member in Composition II must engage in extensive—and expensive—rework in attempting to bring the student to the expected level of achievement, or the faculty member must reject the student—not allow the student in class and send him or her back for rework. A third option, which faculty in frustration sometimes resort to, is simply to pass on the unqualified student to the next internal customer, starting the process all over again for the next faculty member.

When educators shift to a customer focus (rather than a faculty or an institutional focus), real insights can be gained regarding appropriate curricula. Most technical/occupational programs make use of advisory committees. If we have a representative and progressive advisory group, their input as customers could help redefine competencies that are continually responsive to the needs of external customers, such as employers, accrediting agencies, and receiving institutions. Or, we might find it necessary to "re-engineer the actual curricula development process toward a more flexible and robust system capable of responding quickly to external needs" (Peachy and Seymour, 1993, p. 284).

> Finally, listening to the voice of our customers may have the most pervasive impact when applied to our institutions' strategic planning process by generating visions and goals around a comprehensive understanding of our customers' needs and expectations. This will afford us the opportunity to "design in" quality up-front, to reduce rework, and to move dramatically from a reactive mode to a pro-active approach to planning. By using this information to focus and coordinate the skills, processes and functions within our schools, we can design and then deploy services that our customers want and will continue to desire (Peachy and Seymour, 1993, p. 285).

Jackson Community College, Michigan, has defined its two major activities as: 1) teaching and learning and 2) community development. It is in those two spheres that the college attempts to define its customers.

> Our direct customers, those who "receive" our products and services are: other educational institutions, employers, and community and society. These customers receive individuals (our students) who possess knowledge, skills and abilities to perform on the job, transfer to other institutions, and perform in community and society. In this way, community development also occurs.
>
> A striking revelation that occurred within the past year is the realization that students are not our direct customers, but are instead internal customers. . . . Our belief is that students are active participants in our producer system; in essence, students are "co-producers." The learning that occurs is a cooperative effort between students and the faculty who instruct them (Brochett and LeTarte, 1993, pp. 307–308).

Michael Walraven, dean of instruction, describes this relationship:

> If our core process is learning, our core product must be what is learned. Accordingly, our products, those things which we market to our customers, are knowledge, skills, and abilities. These products are produced by the interaction of faculty and students, working together for common goals. While the instructor assumes responsibility for the initial design—the process—the student shares the responsibility for putting the process to work, and ultimately embodies the products of learning (Brochett and LeTarte, 1993, p. 308).

The needs of faculty, as internal customers, must also be attended to. Not only must there be adequate assessment and developmental opportunities to provide the faculty member with an appropriately placed student, the organization must also remove bureaucratic barriers that prevent faculty from devoting their full attention to their customers, the students.

Peter Drucker reports that "faculty in colleges and universities spend steadily increasing hours in committee meetings rather than in the classroom, in advising students, or in research. But few of these committees would ever be missed. And they would do a better job and in less time if they had three instead of seven members" (1992, p. 101). Administration needs to create the environment in which faculty can do what they do best—teach students!

Carothers and Richmond, in *Continuous Quality Improvement* (1993), maintain that the faculty, more than any other group, are the customers of administration. A common mistake is the assumption on the part of administrators that they already know the needs and expectations of their customer, without any real data to support that assumption.

> In addition to the development of personal listening skills, it is extremely important to have a systematic process for assessing the needs of faculty and the performance of administration in meeting those needs. Carefully designed surveys and focus groups can be very helpful in offsetting anecdotal information which is likely to be highly selective in nature. Like every other organization which aspires to quality, we need to hear not what we want to hear but the needs and expectations of our customers *as they define them* (Carothers and Richmond, 1993, p. 189).

To many academics the idea of customers defining quality may be difficult to embrace. Nevertheless, whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, our students—our customers—do pass judgment on our quality.

> Taking a process approach implies adopting the customer's point of view. Processes are the structure by which an organization does what is necessary to produce value for its customers. Consequently, an important measure of a process is customer satisfaction (Davenport, 1993, p. 7).

Adopting the customer's point of view is often difficult. The key to meeting the expectations of current customers is understanding why their expectations may not have been met in the past.

> According to John Goodman, president of the Technical Assistance Research Program, most com-

> panies (and schools are included here) spend 95 percent of their customer service time fixing problems and only five percent identifying and analyzing them. Since the key to any quality process is prevention of problems rather than correction later, educators must understand beforehand the nature of customer expectations (Spanbauer, 1992, p. 36).

To effectively analyze the levels of satisfaction of our external customers, the common forms of feedback work well. Use evaluation techniques such as surveys and comment cards. Focus groups and in-depth interviews with individuals or groups can be very informative. Telephone interviews ensure feedback from customers who may not reply to a written evaluation form.

Internal customers can provide some feedback through these same types of information gathering. They may be more open and direct if assured anonymity. The nominal group technique described in Chapter Six can also be useful. Perhaps most effective is the development of teams empowered to evaluate their functions and suggest and implement ways to improve upon them. Team selection and team building will be discussed at length in a later section.

Attending to the needs and expectations of current customers, internal and external, is the second basic element of Essentialism. But it is not enough merely to be watchful and proactive in dealing with current customers. If we are to succeed and remain viable as a learning organization, we must anticipate the needs and expectations of future customers as well.

Anticipating the Needs of Future Customers

What must we do well today to be assured of success tomorrow? How do we identify future customers and be sure that we anticipate their needs and expectations? What expectations can we anticipate?

Deming's Fourteen Points are accompanied by the Seven Deadly Diseases, which include Number 5, "Running a company on visible figures alone," in which he argues that the most important figures to a business or organization are "unknown and unknowable" (Walton, 1990, p. 19). Why, for instance, is a local high school graduate *not* attending our institution? Why does a local manufacturer purchase a training program from an out-of-state private provider? Why does the principal local bank purchase a set of video tapes and self-instruction books for its customer service training program rather than use the resources of the community college?

Too often we measure our colleges, and the individual activities and processes within them, based on the customers we have, not the total potential customers that are available. The best colleges will regularly ask their past and present customers to evaluate their classroom learning experience. Class evaluations are commonplace. The best colleges may even ask students about nonclassroom services, from food service to financial aid procedures to ease of registration. These questions may be in the form of a survey or evaluation form or focus groups.

But how often does a college interview those in the marketplace who do not use college services? Has your college ever asked businesses why they chose not to use college services? The opinions and beliefs that are revealed through these unknown and unknowable numbers can be even more important than what is known about existing customers. This group constitutes tremendous potential—the future customers whose needs we must anticipate. As Peter Drucker argues, "Marketing starts with all customers in the market rather than with our customers. Even a powerful business rarely has a market share much larger than 30 percent. This means that 70 percent of the customers buy from someone else. Yet most businesses or industries pay no . . . attention to this 70 percent" (1992, p. 254). These are the noncustomers that we want to make into future customers. If we are to remain successful, we must pay more attention to the needs and expectations of this 70 percent.

In an increasingly competitive marketplace, we have seen businesses adapt to new expectations. Probably nowhere has that been more evident than in the mail order catalog business. L.L. Bean has been phenomenally successful in this area. A maker of outdoor clothing and camping gear, the company has used a folksy, family-oriented advertising approach combined with an excellent service record to attain its success. For example, a customer can call in an order using an toll-free 1-800 number twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year. Furthermore, Federal Express delivery is promised in two to five business days. L.L. Bean will tell you when the order will arrive and track the order from shipping to delivery. This is the kind of service customers have come to expect. Can colleges meet the elevated expectations of the new customer?

If we believe that current customers define the quality of the education we provide, then how do we anticipate the quality judgments of future customers? How do we formulate our product—our educational programs and services—to meet their needs? Judgments of quality are not static: they change with increased competition, wider opportunities for choice, and a greater diversity of providers. While the U.S. mail might have been adequate communication ten years ago, today it's hard to imagine conducting business without overnight express and fax machines. The customer of tomorrow, however, will expect communication on the information superhighway. Not only communication but also distance learning and business and industry training will be revolutionized. Are colleges keeping up with the communications revolution as our customers expect? Are we anticipating the needs of future customers?

Future customers should be the focus of planning and market research activities. Without that customer, we may as well close our colleges. As Deming asks, "What does the customer need? How can we be useful to him? What does he think he needs? Can he pay for it? No one has all the answers. Fortunately, it is not necessary to have all the answers for good management" (1986, p. 175).

However, if we are to not only recruit new students, but also retain those we have for future business—remember, we specialize in lifelong learning—we do have to know something about the learner. Deming says:

> Foremost is the principle that the purpose of consumer research is to understand the consumer's needs and wishes, and thus to design product and service that will provide better living for him in the future. A second principle is that no one can guess the future loss of business from a dissatisfied customer. The cost to replace a defective item on the production line is fairly easy to estimate, but the cost of a defective item that goes out to a customer defies measure (1986, p. 175).

Knowing the needs of potential customers involves extensive surveying, careful and continuous reading and evaluation of print and electronic media, awareness and utilization of research, and contact with appropriate agencies and organizations that gather and disseminate data. "Customer preferences and choices are constantly evolving and changing and, therefore, product and service offerings must be constantly evolving and changing too" (Harari, 1993, p. 37).

Educational institutions need to continuously gather, analyze, evaluate, and distribute information that leads to improved quality. Without improved use of existing data and enhanced techniques for gathering future data, our colleges will continue to fail to have accurate and adequate information about the needs and wants of our customers—internal and external—now and in the future.

Indeed, we can never accurately measure the damage a dissatisfied customer may do to the success and credibility of future college efforts. A student who has had a negative experience in the admissions and counseling process may be inclined to spread that negative image in the community. A student who feels misled about career opportunities following a specific course of study can voice that dissatisfaction to other prospective students. We can never know what loss we have sustained—it is the phenomenon of the unknown and unknowable numbers. Dealing honestly and professionally with current customers and listening to their concerns is a huge step forward in anticipating the needs of future customers.

More than fifty years ago Walter Shewhart lamented the difficulty of determining what the future customer wants and needs. Deming later echoed Shewhart's concerns: "The difficulty in defining quality is to translate future needs of the users into measurable characteristics, so that a product can be designed and turned out to give satisfaction at a price that the user will pay. This is not easy, and as soon as one feels fairly successful in the endeavor, he finds that the needs of the consumer have changed, competitors have moved in, there are new materials to work with, some better than the old ones, some worse; some cheaper than the old ones, some dearer" (1986, p. 169).

Unfortunately, a customer—or a student—can seldom say today what new product or service or educational program might be useful five, ten, or twenty years down the road. Deming maintains that new products and new services—and we could certainly add new educational programming—is best generated not by asking the customer or student, but by relying on the knowledge and ingenuity of the professional. "New products and new types of service are generated, not by asking the consumer, but by knowledge, imagination, innovation, risk, trial and error on the part of the producer, backed by enough capital to develop the product or service and to stay in business during the lean months of introduction" (Deming, 1982, p. 182).

It is easy to draw the relationship between this manufacturing model and its educational counterpart. As any community college educator knows, the addition of a new course or program is a risk. Most frequently, the first time the new curriculum is offered enrollment is low. The program may lose money. Doubts begin. Faculty may not put the effort and time into an experimental course that they would into a proven winner. Can we justify putting scarce resources into a new, unproven program when other programs with good track records are not being funded as well as they might? How long can we afford the experiment? How committed are we to producing new programs and knowledge that anticipates future jobs? How can we boost our success rate—and our confidence level—in understanding the needs and expectations of both current and future customers?

The following chapter discusses the importance of environmental and institutional climate in anticipating and meeting the needs and expectations of both current and future customers. We look at the basic components that must be in place for the successful implementation of Essentialism, including strategic planning, environmental scanning, leadership, and empowerment.

The leadership of an organization must, by word and deed, convey the message that customer satisfaction . . . is the responsibility of every member of the organization (Seymour, 1992, p. 15).

CHAPTER FIVE

AN ENVIRONMENT FOR ESSENTIALISM

The successful implementation of Essentialism requires a receptive environment. While there are many factors that contribute to an open environment, at least four are absolutely necessary prerequisites to successful implementation of a quality improvement initiative. First, a college must have an accepted mission statement that is regularly revisited and supported through strategic planning activities. Second, a college should be engaged in some form of environmental scanning. Third, forward-looking, visionary, and supportive leadership must be in place. And fourth, the college must have a reasonably stable environment capable of supporting empowered teams and individuals.

Most colleges have a formally prepared, accepted mission statement in place. Administrators, staff, faculty, students, board, and community must be comfortable with the expressed mission of the college. These people *are* the institution, and they must recognize and affirm who they are, what they do, how they do it, and for whom they do it. The mission statement should be created as part of a strategic planning process. If the college does not yet have in place a mission statement, and if it has not been involved in an ongoing strategic planning process, begin these efforts and satisfactorily complete them before embarking on a quality program.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is a necessary ingredient in an environment conducive to quality improvement—to Essentialism. The mission statement, of course, is an integral part of strategic planning and is often first written, or at least revisited during strategic planning.

The primary purpose of strategic planning is to look into the future and select strategies and activities that will enable the college to grow and remain viable. Strategic planning helps the college evaluate the outside world as well as the internal workings of the college and determine the long range courses of action that will enable the college to deal with the chaotic future. Too often, public entities such as community colleges neglect the obvious—they are as dependent upon customers for their survival as any other business. There are many, many alternatives for most attendees. And it is not just that there are competing colleges, universities, and trade schools that may take away customers. There are other options, including work, in-business training, apprenticeships, self-employment, and leaving the area. It is shortsighted to presume that because we are "the community college" we will always have the students we want to serve and need to enroll. Strategic planning helps ensure that the college makes the right decisions for the future. In truth, successful strategic planning is really all about whether an institution will have a future.

Strategic planning fulfills six specific purposes. First, strategic planning forces a college to be systematic about decision making. By providing structure, strategic planning helps eliminate haphazard or arbitrary decisions. Second, the college becomes more proactive, less reactive. Strategic planning allows a college to identify and act on opportunities, develop new programs more quickly, and address community and customer needs ahead of the demand curve. In short, the institution becomes a leader, not a follower.

Third, the college learns through effective strategic planning how to more efficiently and effectively gather, analyze, evaluate, and act upon information. Too often information that is gathered at a college is neither evaluated nor shared. And often the wrong information is gathered or necessary information is neglected. Strategic planning demands action based upon the information gathered and evaluated. Collection and analysis are not end products but rather steps toward determining an action to be carried out.

Because all of our resources are increasingly scarce—time, people, money, equipment, and facilities—a fourth purpose is served by allocating those resources where they will do the most good. Appropriate strategic planning leads to more effective decision making, prioritizing needs, and assigning resources to meet those needs.

This leads to the fifth purpose of strategic planning: giving greater focus to the efforts of the management team, staff, and faculty. Improved team efforts and more dedication to each agreed-upon goal will be evident. Increased efforts are crucial to working through necessary activities as part of any quality improvement program. Inasmuch as teamwork and consensus building are vital to successful quality improvement programs, practice in working together on developing and focusing on specific goals will set the stage for subsequent work in quality improvement.

Focusing on goals leads to the sixth specific purpose of strategic planning—the college becomes more proficient at developing tools and processes for achieving those goals. Priorities are established, plans of action are created, resources are allocated, and responsibilities and time lines are set. Knowing what is to be done, by whom, with what, by when, is vital to achieving the long-range goals of the college.

Continuous planning is absolutely necessary for the successful survival of a community college. If no strategic planning process is in place, it is inappropriate to enter any quality program, especially an immersion program like TQM as it is often practiced. Essentialism requires certain knowledge of what the college is and does and who it serves. It demands that colleges shed the unnecessary, the unproductive, and the unneeded and concentrate on doing a few things extraordinarily well. Essentialism is about concentrating efforts and resources on those few areas that are required or ensure survival and success. Thus, Essentialism mandates a sense of mission and an ongoing effort to read the future and prepare to deal with it.

Environmental Scanning

An ongoing strategic planning process presumes that some variety of environmental scanning is taking place. In order to meet the challenges of the present and anticipate customer needs in the future, it is imperative that we be aware of trends, new technologies, and demographic shifts that will impact our organizations. Environmental scanning gives us the edge necessary to remain in the forefront of progressive community colleges.

Environmental scanning is a process by which community colleges look at the external environment to anticipate and plan for changes that will impact students, services, and curriculum. Effective environmental scanning will assist in identifying both the trends and the opportunities for the organization. It will promote a future orientation among staff members and leadership that will help the organization make decisions proactively rather than reactively.

Environmental scanning should play an important role in understanding the three basic elements of Essentialism and engaging in strategic planning that responds to those elements. By continually scanning the environment, the college knows what new requirements are coming from regulatory agencies, understands the needs and expectations of current customers, and anticipates the needs of future customers.

Perhaps the simplest way to actually begin a scanning process is to assemble a representative team of interested and motivated faculty and staff members. Provide access to bellwether publications such as the *Futurist, American Demographics,* the *Wall Street Journal,* the *New York Times, Forbes, Atlantic Monthly, Harvard Business Review,* and the major news magazines. Ask team members to skim the appropriate sources in their area of expertise with the objective of discerning new and emerging trends that might apply to their areas of responsibility. Each team member then prepares an abstract, and the abstracts of all team members are consolidated. Some institutions publish regular newsletters that summarize the scanning information.

However, the most valuable use of environmental scanning is in its application to strategic planning.

> Environmental scanning will assist us in the accomplishment of our Mission. . . . by linking environmental scanning to our planning efforts, we can design our future. This is done by setting institutional priorities, developing and implementing specific objectives, and assessing the degree to which we accomplish our objectives. Environmental scanning is also linked to Institutional Effectiveness,

> since scanning can demonstrate the relevancy of our programs and services to the needs of the marketplace (Friedel, 1992, p. 1).

Leadership

TQM requires leadership at all levels, but it is particularly important to have leadership at the top. While significant progress can be made through departments and informal work groups without full support from the top, it is difficult to maintain the momentum for continued success.

Philip Crosby agrees. In *Quality is Free* he states, "If effective quality management is to be practical and achievable, it must start at the top" (1979, p. 22). Basic attitudes must sometimes be changed; open dialogue among various parties must be encouraged. A level of trust is necessary in the quality institution. "Institutional acceptance of TQM and CQA begins with the president. To be perceived as the chief quality officer, the president must become personally knowledgeable about all aspects of TQM and CQA" (Peterson, 1993, p. 20).

The same theme is echoed by Kaoru Ishikawa, one of the originators of the Japanese quality movement. He characterizes total quality control as a thought revolution in management whose impact may be as great as that of the replacement of hand tools with machines as part of the Industrial Revolution (1985). He believes firmly in the importance of leadership from the top in any quality initiative. In fact, he says, "If there is no leadership from the top, stop promoting TQC" (1985, p. 121).

Essentialism, then, or any type of quality improvement program depends first and foremost upon the active and ceaseless support of senior management. If the improvement program and the attempt to continuously delight the customer are not emphasized, valued, and acted upon by the college's leadership, the movement is doomed. And the support must be more than an occasional speech or a note of encouragement to the project teams. Joseph Juran has said, "The most frequent reason for the failure (of quality programs) is the failure of upper managers to have personal involvement ("Report Card on TQM," 1994, p. 23).

Without real effort and initiative from the president and senior administrators, neither employees, nor faculty, nor middle managers will ascribe value to the improvement process. When recommendations are made, improvements are planned, and new methods are suggested, the college leadership must accept, value, and act on them.

If management misuses the improvement concept—seeing it as a quick-fix, a means of driving people to greater effort, or simply a way to add a paragraph to a résumé—the process will fail. An institution must make a long-term commitment to improvement, integrating the principles of Essentialism into all of the ongoing activities of the organization. The college's leadership must make certain that the right degree of commitment for the right reasons drives the quality improvement effort.

Quality organizations cannot grow and develop without quality leadership. Leadership in a culture of continuous improvement requires skills and attitudes that are different from those that might be successful in a more authoritarian and hierarchal environment. Father Theodore Hesburgh, former president of Notre Dame University, has stated, "The very essence of leadership is you have to have a vision. It's got to be a vision you articulate clearly and forcefully on every occasion. You can't blow an uncertain trumpet" (Belasco, 1990, p. 23).

Thus leadership is hard work; it is thinking through the mission, it is sounding the trumpet—the vision—loud and clear. But there is more: Individuals cannot lead if they do not inspire followers. A truly effective leader encourages and empowers others to be leaders in their respective spheres of responsibility. Shared leadership and empowerment of subordinates is crucial to quality—it is an important component of Essentialism.

"Quality can't be delegated. It must be assumed and lived by everyone on the payroll. It must be central to company strategy, operations and individuals' job roles" (Harari, 1993, p. 34). A leader who empowers others, then, is key to a quality organization. Leaders who would promote and embody quality in their organizations must cultivate three key abilities. They must be able to:

- Articulate the vision
- Anticipate change
- Acknowledge the right to fail

Articulate the Vision

Much has been written about visionary leaders. It may seem that a visionary leader has mythical, ethereal, other-worldly qualities—a mystique possessed only by a favored few. Very simply put, however, a vision is a sense of direction and a commitment to that direction.

Remember that a truly successful organization is led by one who encourages and empowers others in their respective spheres of responsibility. Each individual in the organization—from the president to the faculty to the secretaries to the custodians—is responsible for furthering the vision by formulating complementary visions. Each must contribute to the constancy of purpose and each must understand and promote the mission statement, that first guiding principle of Essentialism.

Warren Bennis lists a guiding vision as the first basic ingredient of leadership. Leaders must have a clear idea of what they want to do and what needs to be done, and they must have the strength to persist in the face of setbacks and failures. In articulating the guiding vision, the leader exudes optimism, enthusiasm, and determination. The leader who communicates this passion gives hope, faith, optimism, and inspiration to others. These are characteristics of a leader with a continuous quality improvement orientation.

> If there is to be a significant and permanent change in quality, there must be a change in the institution's culture. We now understand much better how to accomplish such change. It starts with a vision of the institution as it can and should be. It requires leaders who are respected, trusted and committed to that vision, and who can communicate it convincingly and consistently throughout the organization (Gore, 1993, p. 358).

To have a vision is to have a focus, a direction, and the ability to get others to buy into that vision. The vision always relates directly to the mission statement and provides constancy of purpose for the organization.

Anticipate Change

Consider these statements relayed by Joel Barker in his book, *Future Edge:*

> "Babe Ruth made a big mistake when he gave up pitching." Tris Speaker, 1921.

> "I think there is a world market for about five computers." Thomas J. Watson, chairman of IBM, 1943.
>
> "Sensible and responsible women do not want to vote." Grover Cleveland, 1905.
>
> "It is an idle dream to imagine that . . . automobiles will take the place of railways in the long distance movement of . . . passengers." American Road Congress, 1913.
>
> "Flight by machines heavier than air is unpractical and insignificant, if not utterly impossible." Simon Newcomb, astronomer, 1902 (1992, p. 89).

What do these so-called expert opinions have in common? These individuals were unwilling to entertain the possibility of new rules, a new game, a new paradigm—in a word, change. Working toward a new college culture, one of continuous quality improvement, demands a willingness to change. We must constantly look to the future to determine the needs of our constituencies. We must always be looking at the needs of current and future customers. We know, for example, that the American population is aging. By the year 2010, 20 percent of the population will be over sixty-five, requiring a whole constellation of new goods and services, including educational needs. We also know that the workforce will undergo a marked shift. Only 15 percent of those entering the workforce will be white males, with 25 percent white females, and most of the balance Latino, black, and Asian. We know that households headed by single women continue to increase. We know that people change careers an average of five times in a lifetime. Do organizations actively seek to reflect these new realities? Do we know our customers? Is knowing our customers an institutional priority? The environment is not static. Leaders must anticipate change.

Acknowledge the Right to Fail

Jim Burke of Johnson & Johnson expresses this view:

> I decided that what we needed more than anything else was a climate that would encourage people to take risks . . . I started with the premise that we could

> accomplish anything we wanted to accomplish, if the people around me were permitted to do what they wanted to do. From the benefit of hindsight, it was somewhat naive on my part, assuming that anybody can do anything. On the other hand, I think many of my successes are wrapped up in the same thing. If you believe that growth comes from risk taking, that you can't grow without it, then it's essential in leading people toward growth to get them to make decisions, and to make mistakes (Bennis, 1989, pp. 96–97).

It is imperative that we allow staff and middle managers the opportunity to make decisions. That is the essence of leadership in a quality improvement organization. With that opportunity comes the attendant responsibility to be informed, to be aware of implications, to be a team member with a view toward ultimate successes. And with opportunity and the responsibility will come a great many successes as well as some failures. Team efforts will ultimately be the success of the organization, but those teams will, despite the best efforts, occasionally fail. Such is the price of continuous quality improvement, and it is a small price to pay!

Articulating the vision, anticipating change, and acknowledging the right to fail will move a college well along the path to quality improvement. Leadership must assert the vision, change must be seen as constant, and failures, as well as successes, should be celebrated for what they have taught us. In *Reinventing Government,* David Osborne and Ted Gaebler offer an excellent summary of the new world we work and live in and the new necessities of leadership:

> The bureaucratic model developed in conditions very different from those we experience today. It developed in a slower-paced society, when change proceeded at a leisurely gait. It developed in an age of hierarchy, when only those at the top of the pyramid had enough information to make informed decisions. It developed in a society of people who worked with their hands, not their minds. It developed in a time of mass markets, when most Americans had similar wants and needs. And it developed when we had strong geographic communities—tightly knit neighborhoods and towns.

> Today all that has been swept away. We live in an era of breathtaking change. We live in a global marketplace, which puts enormous competitive pressure on our economic institutions. We live in an information society, in which people get access to information almost as fast as their leaders do. We live in a knowledge-based economy, in which educated workers bridle at commands and demand autonomy. We live in an age of niche markets, in which customers have become accustomed to high quality and extensive choice (1992, p. 15).

If our organizations are to be successful in the midst of all this change, we must have effective leadership, leadership that involves all participants in the organization. Open, visionary leadership provides a receptive environment for Essentialism.

Stability and Empowerment

Assuming that strategic planning and environmental scanning are ongoing, and that leadership is open and forward looking, the fourth necessary factor for the successful implementation of Essentialism is a stable environment, one that supports empowerment of teams and individuals. If the college is in crisis—the legislature has just enacted a 30 percent across-the-board cut, the board of trustees is intent on firing the president, or the union is making strike plans—it is not the right time to begin a quality improvement process.

If there are strong sentiments working against quality in the organization, such as the following ones suggested by David Nadler, then some preliminary work needs to be done before a quality improvement effort can begin. "We're smarter than our customers. We know what they really need. Managers are paid to make decisions. Workers are paid to do, not think. If it isn't broken, don't fix it" (Davenport, 1993, p. 304). If these negative sentiments are pervasive in the organization, it is not the right time to begin a formalized continuous quality initiative. Basic attitudes need to be changed first.

Quality improvement requires a stable base, set processes, effective leadership, and a generally positive atmosphere to be successful. Stability and leadership should lead to empowerment, which serves as a catalyst for all sorts of organizational improvements. In fact, Warren Bennis extends the definition of leadership to include empowerment: "Leadership is not so much the exercise of power itself as the empowerment of others" (Coate, 1990, p. 2).

Middle management as well must accept the principles and basic elements of Essentialism. Quite often, an improvement process is pushed off track or held down by middle managers unwilling to relinquish control or unable to accept change. Too often a middle manager fails to understand the meaning of what William Potter, president of Preston Corporation in Easton, Maryland, has said: "When you come to terms with the fact that your employees know more than you do, it's one short step to accepting that, in their areas of expertise, they're quite likely to make better decisions than you will" (Dobyns and Crawford-Mason, 1991, p. 111).

Empowering others to discover problems and create answers is at the heart of Essentialism and most other quality improvement programs. But quite often a manager feels threatened by that empowerment. When quality improvement activities take place outside the traditional chain of command or system of management control and direction, a manager feels unneeded. Thus, middle managers many times sabotage new methods, disrupt the improvement cycle, or abandon quality efforts at the first opportunity. It is necessary to convince middle managers that a quality improvement program does not threaten their security. They must be taught to exercise more coaching techniques, abandon their authoritarian behavior, and cooperate with others in team activities.

> I've seen too many senior and middle managers who at best "support" quality. A manager who "supports" quality allows the dollar investment in TQM efforts, makes a periodic attendance to a quality team meeting, and encourages the TQM consultants who are on-site. That's no longer enough. Commitment is what's enough, and commitment involves a sense of urgency, passion, time allocation and heaps of personal attention (Harari, 1993, p. 35).

Deming and Drucker have both commented on the necessity of empowered workers. According to Peterson (1993), Deming insists that "supervisors must no longer tell their subordinates what to do, but rather what is to be done and how it will be determined that it has been accomplished. Both [Deming and Drucker] agree that empowerment of workers strengthens rather than weakens management authority" (p. 24).

Deming also has suggested that it is critical for leaders to develop a posture of helpfulness—assisting people to do a better job rather than remaining in the traditional supervisory role. Peterson adds that "although this concept has long been espoused in higher education, most of those in leadership positions are not only entrenched in a supervisory mentality, but are actually required to do so by personnel practices and collective bargaining agreements" (Peterson, 1993, p. 20).

Peterson also provides a working definition of empowerment:

> Empowerment is a strategy for achieving enhanced effectiveness by allowing an individual or work group to determine how an outcome will be achieved. Inherent in this delegation of authority is a mutual understanding of the desired outcomes, the extent of the empowerment, and the constraints of existing contracts and policies (1993, p. 20).

The quality movement is more than a passing fad. Those colleges that choose to embrace quality in a systematic way, whether through a full-blown total quality management emphasis or the more user-friendly, resource-friendly Essentialism approach, will move to the forefront in the coming decade. Essentialism encourages the empowerment of individuals within the organization. It gives people a voice in what they do.

Daniel T. Seymour, in an article in the *AAHE Bulletin*, "TQM On Campus—What the Pioneers are Finding" (1991), states that the empowerment aspects of TQM deepen an institution's ability to be responsible and accountable for the services it provides and infuse responsibility and accountability into even the lowest levels of the organizational hierarchy. How much attention do we pay to the training and development of staff as opposed to management? Not only do staff have the first contact with customers and create the most lasting impressions of the organization, but they also frequently have the best ideas on how to get the work done.

Unleashing the creativity and commitment of every employee is a worthwhile, if optimistic goal. Of necessity, employees at an educational institution perform diverse but complementary roles. Which employees are most actively involved in the initial implementation of a quality improvement effort? Oregon State University suggests that it is useful to try the service side first. In an educational setting, to start with the service sector seems easier than starting with the academic side (Coate, 1990, p. 22).

While it may be more appropriate—and easier—to begin a quality initiative in the service areas of the college, it is imperative that we not neglect the academic side. After all, community colleges are first and foremost teaching and learning institutions. Faculty are the very center of our institutions. No long-term, meaningful quality change will occur without the support of faculty. Stanley Spanbauer maintains that "the major requirement of a quality-based school revolves around the notion that lasting and significant change will not occur in schools unless instructors are directly and actively involved in the planning, development, and implementation of the reforms. In this concept, the ultimate innovator in the school is the teacher" (1992, p. 68).

When the instructors work with middle management and other staff to make decisions, better decisions will result. "With this comes a new style of management that focuses on leadership by empowerment of others. Managers rely on their coeducators to make the decisions and come up with solutions that affect their daily work. Teams work together to solve unit problems while meeting departmental and school-wide goals" (Spanbauer, 1992, p. 64). This is empowerment working. A receptive environment for change and involvement is a must for successful quality improvement efforts.

Empowerment, then, involves the willingness of management to let go, to trust the abilities of a trained team to make decisions and implement them. It is the administrator's role to assist in defining the problem, selecting the team, providing the necessary resources, and delegating not only responsibility but also authority to the group. "Empowerment from a TQM perspective is primarily a delegation of authority to a group rather than an individual. It is the group rather than any member of it that makes decisions and takes actions" (Peterson, 1993, p. 27).

When a college has established an environment receptive to Essentialism—characterized by strategic planning, environmental scanning, and stability and empowerment—it has an excellent chance of successfully implementing a continuous quality improvement initiative. It is ready to move on to the nuts and bolts, the tools necessary to identify problems, form teams, and create consensus.

The following two chapters deal with specific—and simple—

tools that will help a college, an administrator, or a faculty member implement Essentialism. We now have the two guiding principles of Essentialism firmly in mind: constancy of purpose and customer satisfaction. We are committed, by the very nature of our institutions, to the three basic elements of Essentialism: accepting regulatory requirements, attending to the needs of current customers, and anticipating the needs of future customers. We have an environment established that is receptive to Essentialism. Now we are prepared to look to how we can accomplish the change, the improvement, the success we know we can achieve. We are ready to examine—and use—the simplified, practical, user-friendly tools of Essentialism.

> *By gathering customer information and using a tool or method to systematically match their needs to our organizational functions and processes, we can . . . add, in the eyes of the customer, real value to the services we provide* (Peachy and Seymour, 1993, p. 284).

CHAPTER SIX

TRADITIONAL TQM TOOLS

Several concepts basic to continuous improvement must be understood at the outset of any quality initiative. The first concept is the difference between *systems* and *processes*. Processes are the individual actions taken to accomplish a particular task, such as registering a student, completing a request for reimbursement for travel, or issuing a faculty parking permit. Our colleges consist of thousands of such processes, made up of thousands of individual actions.

When examined step by step, action by action, any activity becomes more comprehensible and the results of each activity more quantifiable. When organizations and individuals look for ways to improve their processes, they must closely examine each step and its relationship to the other steps in that process. This way it is possible to find problems, wasted efforts, or errors.

The cluster of related processes that focus on achieving a particular result is called a system. That is, the processes of student aid, counseling, registration, and admissions could be identified as the student services system. When looking for ways to improve college quality, it is best to focus on processes; systems are too large to tackle. Improvement in systems results from active and effective improvement of processes and the steps that comprise them. We must "view organizations as systems designed to serve customers. Processes and tasks are linked together and affect one another. To excel at meeting customer needs, an organization must constantly improve these systems" (Scholtes, 1992, p. 2-3).

Those who would implement Essentialism must also understand the concept of *customers* and *suppliers*. An individual performing tasks in a particular process is given a product or service by a supplier. That individual then passes on a product or service to a customer. Customers and suppliers can be external—outside the college—or internal—inside the college. Everyone in the college—faculty, students, staff, administration—is an internal customer, often of each other and often in complex interrelationships. Quality and continuous improvement rest upon the desire to offer better products and services to our customers. "An educational institution is very much a service organization, with customers and products or service offerings. Ultimately, to improve and succeed, any organization must satisfy the needs and expectations of its customers" (Gore, 1993, p. 365).

Finding *root causes* of problems is a vital part of any quality effort and is the third important concept. Root causes are the real reasons a task or process goes awry. Though a cursory examination of a problem—long delays in being reimbursed for travel expenses, for instance—might indicate a particular reason, further examination and data collection might indicate different causes. The search for the root cause is important because problems cannot be eradicated unless the real origin and reason for the problem is discovered. In the case of delayed reimbursements, the announced cause might be that there are too few staff to check the needed reimbursement forms. But careful analysis, counting and recording the specific reasons for delays, and further investigation may reveal that the real, root cause is poorly trained staff and faculty who incorrectly complete the reimbursement forms. The root cause turns out to be different from that which was originally considered. For the team, this effort "means agreeing to make decisions based on data rather than hunches, to look for root causes of problems rather than react to superficial symptoms, to seek permanent solutions rather than rely on quick fixes" (Scholtes, 1992, p. 2-8). Many of the tools of traditional

TQM are designed to discover root causes. Any quality effort requires effective data gathering and evaluating to find root causes, which brings up the fourth building block of any quality improvement program—*measurement*.

To determine the causes of problems and examine the results of improvement activities, exact data must be available. For instance, it takes fourteen days for a typical financial aid application to be processed before implementing changes. If we track the process, we may discover it takes only four days after altering the work flow and the form itself. Measurement is necessary before, during, and after the effort to improve the approval flow.

Various tools can help gather data prior to beginning any problem solving effort. Charts that show the occurrence of problems, length of time required for an activity, causes of returns, or similar information can be constructed for each particular need. Decide as specifically as possible what is to be tracked and what characteristics are important to know. Decide who will track the occurrences, and when and where. Be certain there is absolute reliability and continuity in compiling the necessary information. Once gathered, it becomes the basis for seeking solutions.

During the Plan-Do-Study-Act sequence for implementing quality improvement strategies, which we will describe shortly, measurement continues to be valuable. Once an improvement activity begins, continue to measure. Is the process faster now? Are there fewer errors? Do our customers indicate greater satisfaction on the survey forms? Has the cost of rework gone down? If there is little or no improvement, continue to study the problem and try another approach again, continuously gathering and evaluating data.

A fifth key characteristic of quality is the use of *teams* and *teamwork* to find, address, and correct problems in processes. Deming and others argue that empowered employees—authorized to act, effectively trained, and well-informed—are the key to improving processes. As we shall see in a later chapter, teams can be constructed in several different ways, and they can be authorized to act on projects within particular boundaries. "As a spirit of teamwork invades the organization, employees everywhere will begin working together towards quality—no barriers, no factions, 'all one team' moving together in the same direction" (Scholtes, 1992, p. 2-8). Always, the basic purpose of teams is to seek constantly to improve the work performed so that both internal and external customers are continuously receiving improved products and services.

Finally, the sixth and one of the most important parts of quality improvement is the *Plan-Do-Study-Act* sequence, often referred to as the *Shewhart Cycle*. There are many variations on this activity, but all operate on the same basic principle that a group thinks through possible solutions to a problem or possible ways to improve a process. The team then does whatever they decided might solve the problem or create an improvement. The results of those actions are then studied, to see if the problem is corrected or if a real improvement has occurred. Additional information gathering is necessary here, as customers are surveyed or data is collected. The team reviews the results and decides what further action (if any) is appropriate. The entire cycle then repeats. There is no end to Plan-Do-Study-Act. Continuing improvement demands that an organization continually plan improvements, implement the improvements, study the results and value of the improvements, and refine and build upon the improvements. This never ends. It is continuous quality improvement in action—the essence of Essentialism.

With an understanding of these basic characteristics in place, let's now turn to the TQM basic tools that are most useful in Essentialism's common sense approach to continuous improvement.

Steps to Process Improvement

Four basic, broad steps in traditional TQM help improve a process. And specific tools can help refine and develop each of these basic steps to identify problems and provide a blueprint for improvement. The first step is simply to describe the process, identifying the individual steps or activities that comprise that process. Often, we look to correct a process without fully knowing all of the component parts. This tinkering frequently fails to correct a problem and more tinkering occurs, usually creating additional difficulties and compounding the problem. Writing out the individual parts of the process enables us to determine and confirm the activities involved.

Once described, it is not unusual to discover that the "standard" process at one location, or as performed by one employee, or as offered at one particular time of day, is different from that same process offered elsewhere, or by someone else, or at a different time. It becomes appropriate then to initiate step two—developing a standard process. A process should be the same at all places, at all times, regardless of the employees performing the process.

The third step is to error-proof the existing process. This includes identifying the most common mistakes made in a process, then eliminating and preventing those mistakes in the future. Naturally, this step requires considerable effort to *identify the causes of errors* and problems. Both traditional TQM and Essentialism tools can be used to help identify the causes of these errors and problems.

One way to error-proof a process is to streamline it. Eliminating unnecessary steps, abandoning unneeded requests for data, and removing portions of activities can all be means of streamlining and thereby improving a given process. Tools suggested in Chapters Six and Seven will suggest various means of streamlining a process. Essentialism places great emphasis on the value and ease of this approach.

Another strategy for error-proofing is to reduce the sources of variation in a process. Though this sounds reminiscent of (and is obviously derived from) the manufacturing basis of TQM, it has real legitimacy in dealing with the processes and activities that are integral parts of a college. As with the development of a standard process, reducing variations enables a college to more effectively and efficiently serve customers. Statistical process control (SPC) is often used in manufacturing to identify the sources of variation. SPC is nearly impossible to use in service organizations, but similar, education-oriented approaches can be of great value. Also, the design of a particular process can be, and should be, reviewed to determine if there are inherent factors in place that impact quality.

These three steps—describing the process, standardizing the process, and error-proofing the process—will encourage quality improvements. Most current total quality management programs use several analytic tools that are easy to use and provide data quickly and efficiently. Unfortunately, traditional TQM also provides several tools that are neither easy to use nor particularly useful for service organizations. Because TQM is statistics-based and was developed in a manufacturing context, some of its common analytical tools are inappropriate for our uses. Those that do work well for Essentialism, detailed in the following, can be used alone or in conjunction with several new analytic tools we have added to the TQM toolbox, which are described in Chapter Seven.

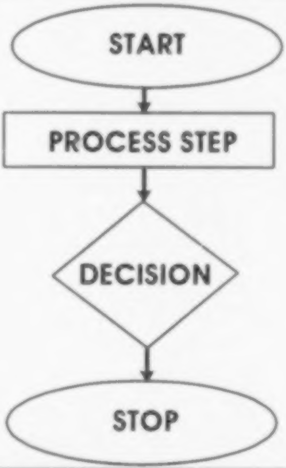
Before we review those TQM tools we believe have most value in a college setting, remember that it is not necessary to be a statistician, a mathematician, or an industrial engineer to effectively use these tools. What is required, however, is the ability to gather, organize, evaluate, and act upon the data collected. Those who participate in particular projects and are part of an improvement team, or who are managers, directors and leaders, particularly need to be able to act; to do this, they need to understand the basic tools at their disposal.

Flow Chart

The description of a particular process and identification of its component parts are a vital part of understanding what goes wrong. Detailing the steps in a particular process can be achieved by drawing appropriate boxes and arrows to identify individual activities, including information gathering and decision making. The amount of detail included can be relatively modest, as information is gathered for a first overview. When investigating the causes of problems, adding greater detail to the flow chart encourages focusing on individual items. Closer consideration of each component part assists in locating the root cause of a problem.

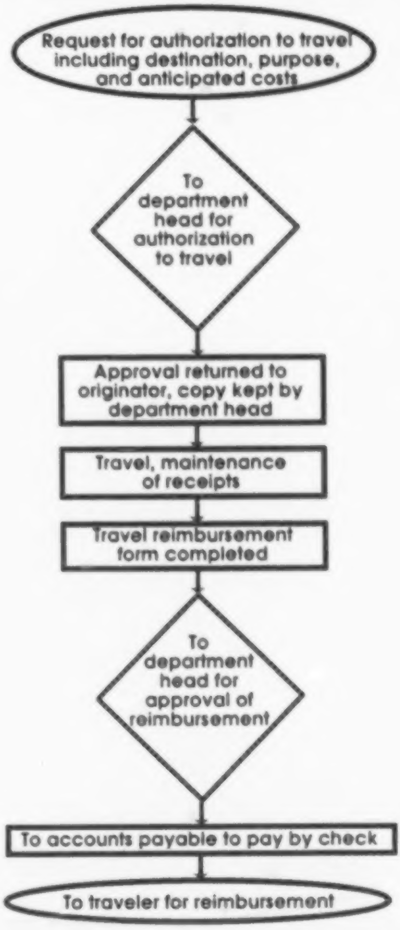
Formal, traditional flow charts could use symbols like those in Figure 1. Arrows can show branching depending on the outcome of decisions, or movement backwards or sideways after approval or rejection of a proposal. But the use of a simple flow chart, as shown in Figures 1 and 2, is much easier and also gives valuable information. Knowing how customers serve each other and how processes depend on other processes can help identify problems. For instance,

Figure 1: Generic Flow Chart



a flow chart for reimbursement for travel expenses might look like Figure 2. As a team reviews this process, hoping to minimize errors and improve the speed of payment, it might decide to break each activity into separate component parts or review each form used.

Figure 2: Flow Chart for Travel Expenses Reimbursement


Request for authorization to travel including destination, purpose, and anticipated costs
To department head for authorization to travel
Approval returned to originator, copy kept by department head
Travel, maintenance of receipts
Travel reimbursement form completed
To department head for approval of reimbursement
To accounts payable to pay by check
To traveler for reimbursement

Work-Flow Diagram

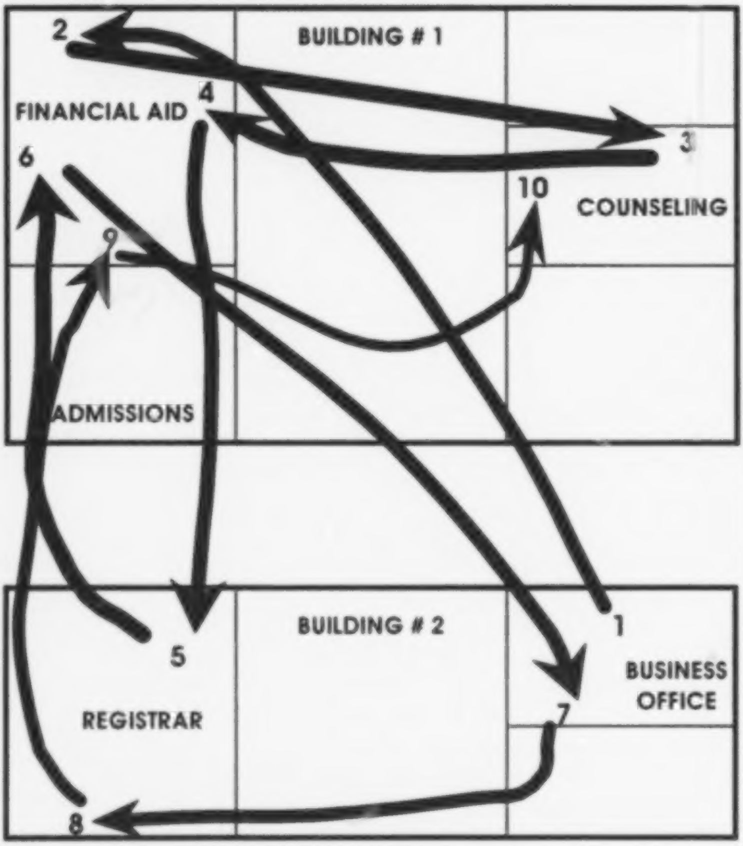
Similar to the flow chart, a work-flow diagram actually "pictures" the movements of people, materials, or information in a particular process. Sketching the flow of the process can help find causes of problems. For instance, a special request for financial aid, in mid-term, might create a work-flow diagram like Figure 3. This is the trail—the actual movements—of a student summoned to the business office for non-payment of tuition due. Personal circumstances—a family emergency—have prevented the student's use of funds for tuition. The student has a legitimate, special need. The course of securing emergency assistance requires movement, conversation, the completing of forms, and a variety of verifications before the emergency aid package can be approved and disbursed. The student must:

1. Meet with business office staff to have the past-due problem reviewed
2. Visit financial aid to explain need
3. Visit a counselor for confirmation of family emergency
4. Return to financial aid for application for emergency assistance
5. Confirm full-time status with registrar
6. Receive award confirmation from financial aid
7. Return to business office to settle accounts
8. Return to registrar to verify that past-due tuition is cleared up and student will remain in school as full-time student
9. Return to financial aid to initiate additional assistance for next semester
10. Visit counselor for confirmation that all of the above has been done

If we closely examine the steps (figurative and literal) this student has taken, it is obvious that the college has demanded a great deal of effort of the student customer, most of which is perhaps unnecessary. The questions that should be asked here are: What is the minimum the student can be required to do to achieve the desired results? Can information needed by individual departments be shared more efficiently than by student shoe leather? What could be left out of this transaction entirely? What value does each step offer to the customer? If there is no value-added benefit to an action, why not eliminate it? Careful analysis of the actual flow of persons, papers, and information can help identify unnecessary and valueless efforts that can then be eliminated or altered.

This same activity works very well when applied to internal customer transactions. Developing work-flow diagrams enables an improvement team to follow the physical flow of people, paper, and information between departments or divisions or individual workers. Once drawn out, the team can begin to minimize unnecessary activities and wasted resources.

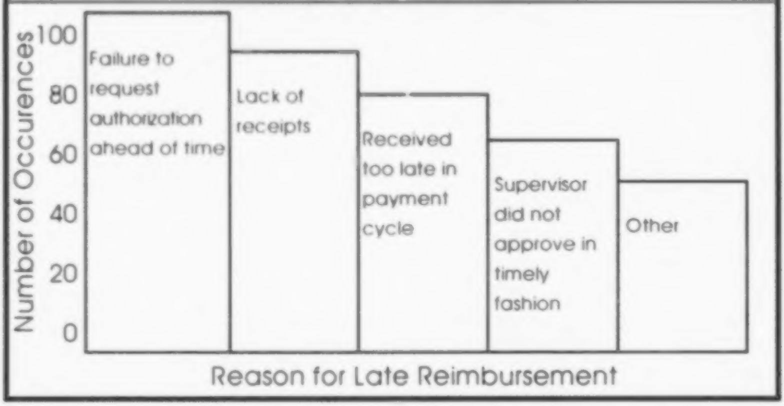
Figure 3: Work-Flow Chart of Student Summoned to Business Office for Non-Payment of Tuition


BUILDING # 1
FINANCIAL AID
ADMISSIONS
COUNSELING
BUILDING # 2
REGISTRAR
BUSINESS OFFICE
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10

Pareto Chart

Most problems are caused by relatively few sources. The Pareto Principle—named for Vilfredo Pareto, a turn-of-the-century economist—states that 80 percent of the trouble comes from 20 percent of the sources. Joseph Juran and other writers applied the idea to contemporary management. Pareto charting identifies the relative importance of the causes of problems by looking at how often they occur and how often they contribute to the problem. For instance, careful monitoring of college employees who did not receive a correct reimbursement check for travel within two weeks might result in the Pareto Chart shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Pareto Chart of Late Travel Reimbusements



Pareto charts identify where the greatest improvement efforts should be concentrated. Is there a reason why authorizations are not requested ahead of time? Can certain authorizations get blanket approval, so that individual requests are unnecessary? For that matter, why require prior authorizations at all? Do we really believe our staff would regularly dash off to Cancun if we didn't require a travel authorization for every trip?

A Pareto chart identifies where the greatest results can be achieved in correcting problems and removing the causes of lost productivity, wasted resources, and unnecessary efforts. Working on improving the greatest source of problems means the greatest return for the improvement effort. Once the greatest cause of the problem is rectified, move on to the second greatest, then the third, and so on. Improvement means continuous effort, but it also means expending effort, whenever possible, where the most noticeable results can be achieved.

Check Sheet

A check sheet is a simple way to gather basic data. The information can also be used to create a Pareto chart. The check sheet is an observation of a particular event or nonevent and a notation of when and where it happened. Participants must agree on what is being observed and noted and the period of time over which the observation will occur. Naturally, the information must be collected in a consistent manner.

Figure 5: Check Sheet for Mistakes in Payment

PROBLEM	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	TOTAL
Late payment to vendors	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓		✓✓	8
Partial payment to vendors	✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓✓✓	16
Incorrect payment to vendors		✓		✓	✓✓	4
TOTALS	5	7	4	3	9	28

Be certain to identify the exact problem as specifically as possible, within reason. This enables an improvement team to acquire specific information and helps focus the improvement efforts. The check sheet is particularly valuable in ascertaining the causes of problems when dealing with suppliers of products, services, or information, as in Figures 5 and 6. The check sheet includes not only the problem and occurrence of the problem, but also the source. For instance, the book store might wish to identify the reason why jackets, T-shirts, and other clothing are being returned to a wholesaler, as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Check Sheet for Returns from Book Store

	AUGUST			
	SUPPLIER A	SUPPLIER B	SUPPLIER C	TOTALS
Wrong Sizes	✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓	7
Wrong Materials		✓✓✓✓✓		5
Wrong Colors	✓	✓✓✓✓✓		6
Arrived Late	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓	10
Arrived Damaged	✓✓✓✓✓		✓✓✓✓✓✓	11
TOTALS	11	17	11	39

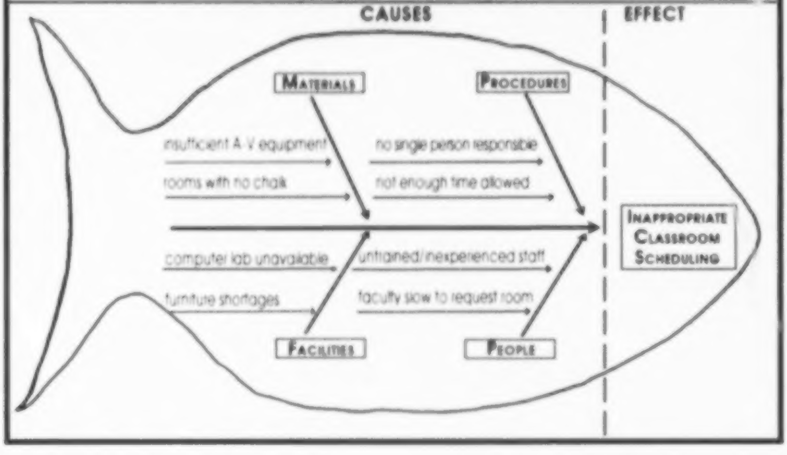
In addition to identifying reasons for the returns, this type of check sheet identifies the source company. Perhaps most of the returns are for one or two reasons that originate in the book store. For instance, are suppliers delivering late because orders are placed late in the order cycle? Or is Supplier B the great offender for wrong sizes, materials, and colors—despite the orders being placed correctly? Then again, if Supplier A and Supplier C often have goods returned because they arrived damaged, should we review the carriers? Another chart listing the motor freight carriers might indicate a common cause for both suppliers of damaged goods.

Cause and Effect Diagram

Problems may have many possible causes. A cause and effect diagram helps visualize the effects of particular components (causes) on the desired result (effect). Also called the Taguchi chart and the fishbone diagram, this is particularly helpful when there are several possible impacting activities, people, or materials. A traditional "industrial" fishbone often shows material, methods, machinery, people, and facilities as the causes. However, it is acceptable to use any appropriate categories. Thinking along the lines of the four traditional causes—materials, procedures, facilities, and people—can help identify what is appropriate for a particular area, but do not hesitate to create and add lines that will help detail additional possible causes.

Each major cause is composed of individual activities that impact that area and may ultimately be the root cause of the problem. For instance, the fishbone diagram in Figure 7 examines the causes of inappropriate classroom scheduling. Too often we may find two instructors assigned to the same classroom at the same time, classes of forty-five assigned to rooms of twenty-five chairs, or classes with sophisticated audio-visual needs assigned to traditional chalkboard classrooms. By carefully examining the causes that lead to a specific effect, we can then explore in more detail those problem areas we need to address first.

Figure 7: Fishbone/Cause and Effect Diagram of Classroom Scheduling Problems


CAUSES
EFFECT
MATERIALS
PROCEDURES
insufficient A-V equipment
no single person responsible
rooms with no chalk
not enough time allowed
computer lab unavailable
untrained/inexperienced staff
furniture shortages
faculty slow to request room
FACILITIES
PEOPLE
INAPPROPRIATE CLASSROOM SCHEDULING

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a common technique for thinking through a problem or process impediment. Brainstorming can be performed in a formal or informal manner. For both methods the group must be aware of the question or issue being addressed. It should be written out for all to see, as specifically as possible.

In a formal brainstorming session, each person is called upon to provide an idea, alternative, or comment. This encourages participation, but it can be very trying for shy persons and even create too much pressure on participants. Informal brainstorming simply allows input when and as participants feel comfortable. Though this method minimizes embarrassment, it can allow the session to be dominated by one or two strong personalities.

In both formal and informal brainstorming, there are some guidelines to follow. First and foremost—no initial criticism of suggestions is allowed. Any and all suggestions are simply accepted. Second, every concept offered is written down, preferably on a flipchart or wetboard so further ideas will be encouraged and repetition is avoided. Third, try for a fast pace and limit the time involved, usually no more than twenty or thirty minutes—dependent, of course, upon the complexity of the issue being addressed and the number of participants.

Brainstorming is most often used as a way to generate possible solutions to a problem. It enables a group to create many ideas in a short time. It can also be used to rapidly identify and list possible problems and areas of impact—anything that needs rapid, wide-ranging input without immediate evaluation.

Nominal Group Technique

A second technique useful in identifying problems is the nominal group technique. The particular value of this activity is that it gives all participants an equal opportunity and encouragement to express their ideas and opinions. It prevents domination by authoritarian or domineering participants.

The steps usually used in the nominal group technique are:

1. Participants write their suggestions, problems, or issues on index cards or memo pads, only one item per index card or memo sheet.
2. A moderator collects the recorded ideas, then writes them out on a wetboard or flip chart. If there are similar problems or issues, the moderator should combine them.
3. Each issue or problem is then lettered; if there are six statements, for instance, these should be designated "A" through "F." Each participant then writes "A" through "F" on an index card or memo pad.
4. The participants rank the issues with "6" being most impor-

tant and "1" the least important. If there are more than six issues, participants should vote for only six and give the rest of the issues a rank of "0."

5. The moderator asks for each participant's designation of the most important, then second most, third most, etc. The rankings are noted on the flip chart or board.
6. The score for each issue is then totaled. The issue or problem with the highest score is of greatest importance to the group. Each issue can then be assigned a priority.

This ranking determines which issues or problems are viewed as most important by the entire group. Again, the great value here is in preventing one or two particularly strong personalities from dominating a discussion. It also encourages assignment of value without pressure or prejudice from the group as a whole.

These evaluative techniques and problem-discovering activities can be useful in determining what quality issues should be addressed by a given group. These tools are simplified versions of the more complex industrial model; traditional TQM tools available for discerning and ranking problems and issues are formidable. Effective use of these traditional tools, complemented by the Essentialism tools described in the next chapter, will enable managers and teams to deal with the obstacles that prevent quality in a process and thus inhibit the development of quality-oriented institutions.

Motivation is not sufficient to generate change. The means must also be present. An alternative pathway needs to exist so that a conscious choice can be made—the status quo versus something else (Seymour, 1992, p. 8).

CHAPTER SEVEN

NEW TOOLS FOR ESSENTIALISM

In addition to the tools selected from traditional TQM, Essentialism offers several new tools for practical use in improving quality. Essentialism approaches continuous improvement as something that can be best accomplished by using pragmatic, relatively simple, easily implemented tools. In this chapter, we suggest eight such tools. These can be used independently to attack a specific problem, in combination with other Essentialism tools, or in conjunction with simple traditional tools.

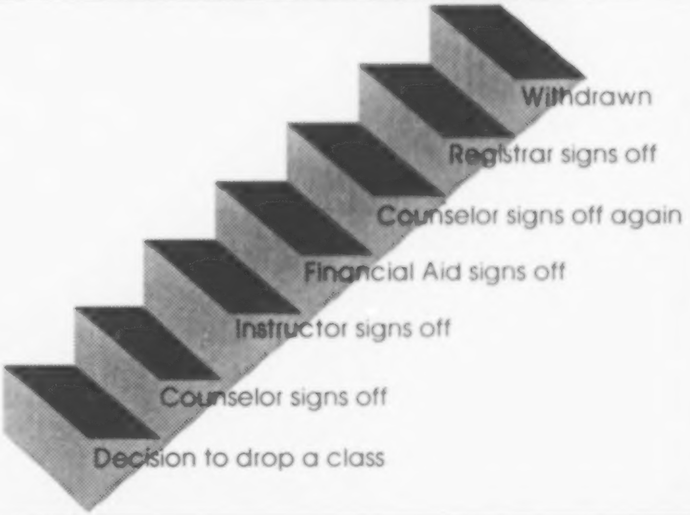
Stairsteps Analysis

One useful tool is stairsteps analysis. To achieve a particular goal, a system may have many processes and a process may have many individual steps. Too often, an organization fails to realize the number of steps that have been created to get from point *A* to point *B*. Often these steps have been developed over an extended period of time. There may have been good reasons for each step at the time it was added. But there may also be no good reasons for retaining a step and very good reasons for removing it. One way to evaluate the necessity of each of the steps is to create a set of stairsteps that illustrate the process.

The top step is the desired goal. The bottom step is the initial action taken toward achieving that goal. The intervening steps are all of the required actions to get to the top step. Once these are drawn up, it is easier to apply the three basic elements to each step: Is it required by a regulatory agency? Does it meet the needs of current customers? Does it anticipate the needs of future customers?

As always, a component of any activity must add value to the desired goal. For instance, Figure 8 illustrates the steps that lead to a withdrawal of a student from class. If we ask basic questions about the value of these steps we may discover that many of them are unnecessary. If a process provides no benefit to our customer, it should be abolished. The student wishes to withdraw from a class. The reason could be an altered work schedule, a change in career plans, an intense dislike of the instructor, or a decision to move to Europe. The process of withdrawing requires five separate steps between the student's decision and actual formal withdrawal from the class.

Figure 8: Stairsteps Analysis of Student Withdrawing from a Class


Withdrawn
Registrar signs off
Counselor signs off again
Financial Aid signs off
Instructor signs off
Counselor signs off
Decision to drop a class

Do all of these steps meet the requirements of the three basic elements? As a state-supported institution, the college must know how many individuals are attending how many hours of instruction. Internal customers need to know if financial aid is no longer being used, how many students an instructor should expect in a class, and whether a student is enrolled or not. These are all legitimate internal customer needs, and it is fair and appropriate to expect this information to be available.

And what of the student? The student needs the opportunity to be counseled by a college staff member—perhaps the career choice change is not as appropriate as the student thinks. Perhaps dropping this course will delay expected graduation by a semester. Perhaps a personal problem can be solved with further counseling, referral to a child care service, or a change of schedule. There is great value to the customer in having needs and plans carefully reviewed with a counselor. But what is the value of requiring the instructor to sign off? In having to go to financial aid and the registrar in person? Why demand valueless efforts from the customer?

In fact, we would not only be saving the student from valueless effort, we would also be saving the instructor, the financial aid officer, and the registrar valueless efforts. The only necessary—essential—steps are to have the student be counseled and the guidance professional sign off, with copies of the withdrawal forwarded to the instructor, financial aid, and the registrar. The external customer—the student—and the internal customers—the instructor, registrar, and financial aid office—have been saved from the added burden of signing off. Those signatures are simply not necessary. Receiving the appropriate information is important, but it doesn't have to be derived from direct student contact.

Stairsteps can be used whenever appropriate to review ways to pare down what staff, faculty, students, and administration must do to achieve a goal. As Peter Drucker says, "The first question in increasing productivity in knowledge and service work has to be: What is the task? What do we try to accomplish? Why do it at all? The easiest—perhaps also the greatest—increases in productivity in such work come from redefining the task, and especially from eliminating what needs not be done" (Drucker, 1992, p. 98).

Wallpapering

A similar exercise, a variation on the above method, has been cited in Crosby's Quality Without Tears (1984). Take each form, each piece of required paperwork for a particular activity or process, and tape it to the wall. After you have covered the wall with paperwork, can any of the forms be pulled down and thrown away? Evaluate each form, using the basic elements of Essentialism. Does it meet the requirements of regulatory agencies? Does it meet the needs of current customers? Does it anticipate the needs of future customers?

Crosby used the example of salespeople who were unhappy with redundant required paperwork. Using the wallpapering technique, they found that 80 percent of what was being asked for was unnecessary. So they did away with it!

Not only is each individual form reviewed, but the individual parts of each form are examined as well. If a form, or even one question on a form, does not meet the three basic elements of Essentialism, do away with it. A team composed of members from various departments can also use the format to combine forms and requests for information, thus minimizing the repetitiveness often found in the college's systems. For example, as Peter Drucker writes:

> A well-known private college has been able to cut its financial-aid staff from eleven full-time clerks to one or two people who work in financial aid for only a few weeks a year. Like other institutions of its kind, the college admits qualified applicants without regard to their ability to pay, with the financial-aid office then determining what tuition reduction an applicant can be given. This was done—and in most colleges is still being done—by laboriously working through a long and detailed form submitted by each applicant. But for 95 out of each 100 applicants financial aid is actually determined by very few factors. Being told the family income; the value of the family home; what, if any, additional sources of income there are—e.g., from a trust fund—and whether there are siblings presently paying college tuition, the computer figures out in a few seconds how much financial aid will be offered. The two part-timers are needed only to winnow out the five percent of unusual cases—the applicant who is a star athlete or a National Scholarship winner—which are then easily dealt with by the dean and a small faculty committee in a few afternoon hours (1992, p. 99).

Desired/Required Matrix

Another tool of Essentialism is the desired/required matrix for information gathering. Not all activities, all parts of a questionnaire, or all processes are necessary. But how can we effectively demonstrate to ourselves and to others the relative usefulness of what is asked for, what is required, and what is done? For instance, examining one by one the questions asked on any college questionnaire or form will usually uncover questions that have less value than others. Perhaps we will discover questions that have no value, or whose value—once obvious and necessary—is no longer apparent.

> Identify lower-value activities and eliminate them. Given the reduction of the past few years, you may believe that there are none left. But undoubtedly there are. Cuts have been made. But were they right ones or simply the easy ones? My guess is that the hard choices lie ahead (Hartley, 1993, p. 337).

To evaluate the value of the information requested on specific forms, begin with a simple double axis format, as illustrated in Figure 9. The horizontal axis is desirability—that is, of what use is the information? Does the admissions office track a particular piece of information because it helps recruit additional students, the college's future customers? Does it help for admissions to know who will be paying for a particular course? Again, this may help recruit future customers; it may also help us better serve existing customers if we have better information about how they pay for their training

Figure 9: Desired/Requried Matrix of Information Requested from Students

NECESSITY

	HIGH	LOW
HIGH	Is Student a High School Graduate? Which High School? (Required by State Education Department) High School Transcripts (Requested by Counseling)	Gender of Student (Federal Reporting Requirement)
LOW	Who is Responsible for Paying Student's Fees and Tuition? (Requested by Financial Aid/Business Office)	Number of Children in Family (Requested by Financial Aid/Admissions Office)

DESIRABILITY

and education. This information has value because it meets two of the basic elements of essentialism. It serves existing customers and it serves future customers. Though not required, it is highly desired.

The other axis, the vertical, is based upon necessity—whether it is required or not. That is, does a particular question meet a need, defined in most cases as being required by an accrediting or funding agency? The third element of Essentialism drives the placement of items on this axis. For instance, if a particular piece of information is solicited on a form because the state requires that information, it will be placed high on the vertical axis. Even though the information might not be particularly desirable or valuable for the college's needs, it may be required by state or federal authorities or agencies. Thus, it ranks high on the required axis but low on the desired axis.

A quick series of common sense questions will assist in developing this matrix. These questions should continually be asked of each process, and each part of each process, right down to individual questions on a financial aid form. Ask such questions as:

Who required it?
Who asks for it?
Who uses it?
What is its specific purpose?
What is the value of that purpose?
What if it were not asked for?
What if it were not done at all?

Simple as this sounds, it requires thoughtful, widespread discussions of all that the organization does, all that it asks, and all that it requires. Institutions not only alienate existing and future customers but often waste valuable resources of internal customers as well by acquiring information that has minimal value and really meets the needs of no one. "It is like someone on a tight budget keeping neat records of overspending. Make certain you keep your eye on the true reason for the calculation. Don't get lost in statistical swamps" (Crosby, 1979, p. 126).

Repetitive "Why"

One of the more effective ways to reach the core of a process or activity is to repetitively ask why. This is particularly useful when considering the addition of an activity. It can also be effectively used to get to the root of a particular issue. Once the first answer is received, again ask why. It may take five or six "why" questions to reach the origin of the activity that prompted the first "why."

For example, a committee on college ethics may meet monthly, even though there is a completed, acceptable, and internalized policy in place, which was created by the predecessors on this committee years ago. A dialogue about this committee and its usefulness might proceed as follows:

> The ethics committee meets once per month.
> *Why?*
> To discuss ethics and the oversight role of faculty and administration.
> *Why?*
> If there is a question of ethics that needs to be addressed, our committee will be ready!
> *Why?*
> Because the policy we created four years ago stipulated there would be an ongoing committee to deal with problems.
> *Why?*
> Because it was thought there might be problems.
> *Why?*
> Because there used to be ethics problems until the prior committee created a policy, which has stipulated an administration process for such problems. And that is how they are now handled! But our committee still meets (said with a mixture of insight and regret over lost hours).
> *Why?*

Eventually, asking why will bring out the underlying reason for the creation of the activity in the first place. It is then appropriate to apply the standard test, the basic elements, for the value of that activity. The last "why" answer should verify that the activity either meets the requirements of an agency or governing body or meets the needs of existing or future customers.

How Do You Know?

Asking the question, How do you know? can also get at root causes. It can often stand alone, but it is especially helpful when used in conjunction with the repetitive "why."

Unfortunately, we often use anecdotal information or personal feelings to support (or attack) a particular belief or process. It is valuable to ask, How do you know? when confronted by a co-worker or administrator who offers an opinion or speculates about causes of particular problems or reasons for particular activities. Seeking the real cause of a problem demands factual information, not opinion.

For example, at a particular college, year after year, currently enrolled freshmen failed to preregister for their sophomore classes during the spring semester of their freshman year. (We shall assume here that preregistering freshmen for the sophomore year meets the criteria of the basic elements of Essentialism by serving one of the college's internal customers—this may not be true.) Why don't freshmen preregister? Because they're only eighteen or nineteen and just don't think it's important to pre-register. Why don't they think it's important? Because they don't care if it is registration time; they believe they will be able to get into the classes they want. (And perhaps the students are correct.)

How do you know that is what they think? The answer to this last question is often based on feelings, anecdotal evidence, casual conversation, anything but fact. To ensure that the correct questions are asked and appropriate action is initiated, the college needs factual data. A survey of freshmen, a series of focus groups, any collection of information acquired directly from the customer will have real value, as opposed to the anecdotal information that would usually be used to answer the question, How do you know? The surveys and focus groups might indicate that freshmen don't preregister because they must stand in line for an hour—only during the hours 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 to 4 p.m., when they quite often are in class or at work—and must have the individual signatures of each class instructor to sign up for the class, etc. These replies provide some factual information on which to base further "why" questions. An occasional "how do you know?" can be of tremendous value and provide a basis for appropriate action.

Three Dumb Questions

Another excellent way to pare unnecessary and valueless activities from an institution is to ask each employee the simple question, What is the dumbest thing you do on the job? Everyone will have an immediate answer to that question. A good follow-up question—Why do we do it?—will often elicit the view that there is no reason why it's being done. Which leads to the third question—What if we stopped doing it? Usually, the reply is one with positive ramifications. Resources might be saved, customers might be better served, time for truly important activities might be garnered.

A community college president was asked the question, What is the dumbest thing you do? Endless, unnecessary, duplicative signing of requisitions, time sheets, travel forms, etc. Why do you do it? Tradition! Because the president before me did it. But why? Perhaps because the president did not trust the dean of the college or the academic dean or the department coordinator to responsibly live within the established budget and to use good judgment. Perhaps, though, in a genuine CQI environment, an environment in which workers are truly empowered, such a line of signatures should not be necessary. What would happen if we did not do it? Perhaps individuals would assume more responsibility and initiative. Perhaps the institutional climate would improve. Perhaps people would trust one another more completely and they would work together more effectively. Why not try it?

In *Managing for the Future,* Peter Drucker asserts, "But the people who actually do most of the knowledge and service work in organizations—engineers, teachers, salespeople, nurses, middle managers in general—carry a steadily growing load of busy work, additional activities that contribute little or no value and that have little or nothing to do with what these people are qualified and paid for" (1992, p. 101).

Peter Drucker has also said that his consulting successes have not been a result of his good answers but rather his good questions. Asking the three dumb questions is likely to bring forth some rather smart answers!

Ask for the Task

Remembering that the task is the boss will help teams and individuals concentrate on essential activities. Determining the ultimate purpose of a task is the first and most important activity whenever we evaluate what we do, what we ask for, what we expect a customer to do. That is, why are we doing something? Always go back to the three elements of Essentialism for the test of value and appropriateness.

Once it is determined that a given task is essential, let the task itself become the driver for all related or ancillary activities. For instance, if the task is to gather sufficient information for a student to register for a continuing education class, and it has been fully determined that the task is essential, push the task, let it be the boss of the entire function. What does one need to know to register the student? Get the basics only. Do not solicit unnecessary information, require multiple counselor signatures, or expect a visit to the registrar's office.

In one college we reviewed, the task was to have each student who received a particular type of student loan view a thirty-minute video on loan recipient responsibilities. But the financial office demanded that every student receiving any form of financial aid view the video. When asked why, they replied that they didn't want to miss anyone, and while they had all students together as part of the assessment process, they would have them all watch the video.

Asking what is really the purpose—what is the task—and then stripping away the unnecessary, enables a college to better serve its customers. In this case, the task was to meet a federal government regulation that required recipients of federal loans to be informed of particular rules and regulations and their responsibilities to pay back the loan. Fair enough; that particular task is required by an oversight agency, and it meets one of the elements of Essentialism. But it is essential only for those students who received those particular loans. Nonrecipients do not need to be informed. The task can be minimized. Students can be better served by not wasting their time in activities with no relevance.

Sunset Laws

Simple sunset laws for new activities, processes, and even systems can be of great value in limiting the growth of an institution's bureaucracy. Any new activities should be subject to fullest use of the Plan-Do-Study-Act review we discussed before. In addition to adding and altering activities and processes to achieve fullest customer satisfaction, it is also appropriate to set a cancellation time. Beginning a new request for information, a new registration process, or a new faculty review process, then evaluating and modifying it as necessary, is not enough. Rather, establish a set time in the not-too-distant future to review the entire activity for value. Agree to stop the activity unless it is reviewed, evaluated, and confirmed that there is real value in the activity at that future date. Let the sunset provision force an evaluation of what has been begun. Don't let a college bureaucracy "just grow."

Peter Drucker recommends such a strategy as part of an ongoing evaluation of the value of an organization's activities:

> It requires that every operation and every activity be put, every third year or so, to the question: "Do we really need to do this or should it be abandoned?" It requires that new operations and activities—and especially new staff operations—be entered only if an old operation is abandoned or at least pruned back. Each operation and activity should also be questioned—again every three years—as to the purpose it serves and the contribution it makes to the business. And each, finally, should be subjected to the question: What is the simplest way to achieve this purpose? (1992, p. 201).

Apply the sunset provision to keep the organization focused and in line with the guiding principles of Essentialism—constancy of purpose and customer satisfaction.

The eight new tools of Essentialism are not really all that new. In many cases, they are simply good management strategies and common sense formalized. However, their value lies in having a working knowledge of the tools and a willingness to apply those tools to improve processes and systems. They are an excellent complement to the simplified traditional TQM tools discussed in the previous chapter. Making these tools useable by and accessible to anyone within an institution helps create a positive attitude toward identifying and solving problems. The eight user-friendly tools described and illustrated in this chapter, applied to institutional concerns on a regular basis, will bring about continuing quality improvement—guaranteed.

What we need to do is eliminate the dumb stuff we are doing! (Faulkner, 1993, p. 2).

CHAPTER EIGHT

IMPLEMENTING ESSENTIALISM

So how does one begin an Essentialism effort? Several critical tasks are involved in making any quality improvement initiative successful. These are the essentials: the selection of a project, the selection and training of a team, and an understanding of the pitfalls inherent in a continuous quality improvement effort. Of course, those involved must be aware of the two guiding principles and the three basic elements of Essentialism. Management, at all levels, but particularly at the top, must be committed to quality improvement. And all participants should have a basic understanding of selected traditional TQM tools and the eight Essentialism tools.

Project Selection

Project selection is often made into a complex, involved, and protracted activity in and of itself. This defeats the purpose of achieving noticeable improvement of real value in a timely manner. Too often the long training process in TQM or CQI is capped by an equally long process for selecting appropriate projects to work on. Then begins a long process of gathering data and reviewing possible solutions and then—finally—comes actual implementation.

Essentialism suggests less involved, more readily achieved project selection. The question is often asked, Where should we begin? The reply—anywhere! It can be an area in which problems are well-known and regular. Perhaps it will be an area for which people have been offering suggestions for improvements. Perhaps it should be an area where things are going well, to see what small but valuable improvements can be made even in a successfully functioning system. In fact, it just doesn't matter a great deal where the application of Essentialism is begun. Some good advice comes from Oregon State University, which has been working on TQM for several years. In describing where to start, they suggest, "Do not research TQM too exhaustively. Learn about the steps necessary to form and operate a team, then start one. Only by practical experience can an institution discover how TQM really operates" (Coate, 1991, p. 38).

It really is not necessary to train all employees. It is probably not possible or wise to attempt to implement a collegewide improvement program. Begin with a single project of relatively small size. Select a team of appropriate persons who are or should be involved in the activity. Be certain that the team members understand the need for quality and improvement in all that the college offers. Explain the guiding principles and basic elements of Essentialism. Provide training and information on the traditional TQM tools and the new Essentialism tools. Be certain that appropriate data has been gathered, evaluated, and shared. Consider and select possible improvement activities. Implement the chosen tactic, monitor the results, and, if successful, sing praises and move on. If unsuccessful, continue the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle.

This sounds impossibly simple. But that's the point of Essentialism. Keeping the process simple ensures quicker results of real merit using minimal fiscal and human resources. Most college personnel want to improve processes, successfully serve customers, minimize disruptions and waste, and continually do better. Essentialism enables people to accomplish these natural desires.

When selecting a project or projects to begin applying Essentialism, however, four appropriate characteristics of a good project will help ensure success early on. Use these criteria when selecting the first projects. First, begin with a small project. Rather than attempt to improve an entire process, select a small component that can be handled relatively easily. For instance, rather than trying to improve the entire community education registration process, work on the form used to sign up for a class, which asks for too much of some information and too little of other information. Pick a project of a size that does not intimidate or require exceptional effort.

Second, pick a project that will create results that can be measured. If, for instance, the project is to minimize returns of clothing sold from the bookstore, then tracking the returned items before and after the project improvement is implemented will show measured improvement.

Third, the project must be reasonably quick. Naturally, this is largely tied to the size of the project. Speed may also be tied to the number of approvals necessary to implement the project, however, or the amount of new data to be acquired or existing data to be compiled, evaluated, and made useable. Many factors can affect the speed with which a project can be accomplished, but always bear in mind the importance of completing projects quickly. Do not let them drag on!

Finally, the project must be one of recognizable importance. The project must make a real difference to customers, internal or external. It must have value to those it serves. As participants recognize the value of implementing Essentialism, they will become disciples, spreading the quality gospel to others in the college. As momentum grows, larger and more involved projects can be undertaken by larger groups. Massive projects involving large numbers of people are almost certain to expire from their sheer bulk. Continually making small but important improvements will lead to greater overall success.

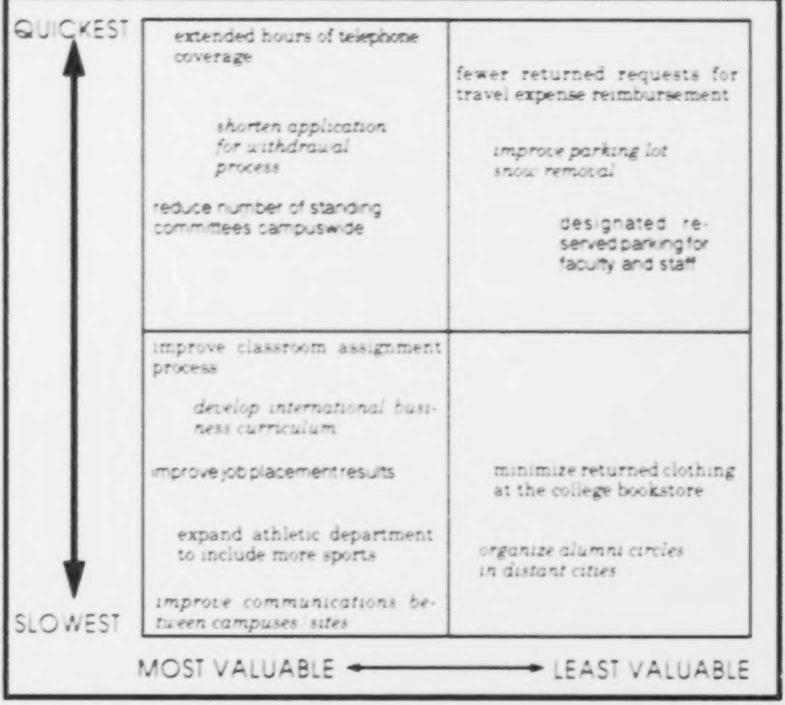
> Successful programs will look for what can be done by their people today that will make things better immediately. Successful companies will string together a growing list of small accomplishments into a building momentum (Leader, 1989, p. 67).

Figure 10 may help in deciding which project to select first to begin that growing list of small accomplishments. The thirteen project improvement projects shown were suggested by a brainstorming group looking to improve customer service. Ask for input from those involved in the tasks, for advice and direction from customers affected, for evaluation by group consensus of those involved. This requires factual data, a straightforward presentation by the proposing party, and some method of voting, such as the nominal group technique. If there are ten proposals, for instance, each participant can be given ten Post-it™ notes, each numbered to correspond to a proposal. They can then be posted on a large wall chart, drawn as the matrix above. This voting helps determine the group's preferences and values.

The top left quadrant represents those activities considered quickest to achieve and of most value. The lower left quadrant contains valuable activities that may take a considerably longer time. Upper right quadrant activities can be quickly achieved but have comparatively little value, while lower right quadrant activities are both slow and of little value.

Once the proposals are discussed and rated, the matrix enables the group to evaluate where to apply improvement techniques to

Figure 10: Project Selection Matrix


QUICKEST
SLOWEST
MOST VALUABLE
LEAST VALUABLE
extended hours of telephone coverage
shorten application for withdrawal process
reduce number of standing committees campuswide
fewer returned requests for travel expense reimbursement
improve parking lot snow removal
designated reserved parking for faculty and staff
improve classroom assignment process
develop international business curriculum
improve job placement results
expand athletic department to include more sports
improve communications between campuses/sites
minimize returned clothing at the college bookstore
organize alumni circles in distant cities

achieve the greatest value most quickly, an essential for a first project.

Teamwork

Effective implementation of Essentialism or any other total quality program depends to a large degree upon the development and use of teams. Teams, used appropriately, will enable an organization to create functioning groups of individuals who identify and solve problems together. Teams will allow individuals who were formerly only "order-takers" or "producers" in the college hierarchy to participate in improving the processes in which they are involved.

> To cooperate with others in accomplishing a task is one of our nobler accomplishments. It is also one of the more productive aspects of the manager with style. The whole really is greater than the sum of its parts. Synergism really does work, if you will let it (Crosby, 1979, p. 148).

Teams bring together more knowledge, skills, and tools than an individual usually possesses. Teams are a form of empowering those who do the work to seek ways to improve the doing of the work. Teams are not a means of voting, managing decisions, or using management power. Rather, teams are a way to encourage and implement solutions to problems that stand in the way of quality improvement.

In the confines of this book, it is impossible to spend a great amount of space on teams and team building. An overview, guidelines, and a mere handful of suggestions and tools for building successful teams are provided. Many publications are available that give further guidance in creating and effectively using teams.

Generally, three types of teams already exist or can be created within an institution. The first is a natural team, usually a department, division, or office within the college. These are people who regularly work together within a particular process or system. They are internal customers of each other, have regular interaction with each other, and often work in close proximity to each other. An example might be the admissions office or the alumni office.

A second type of team is the cross-functional team, a group of people who regularly interact because they are involved in closely related processes. This category could include a group composed of admissions, financial aid, and registrar's office staff, for instance.

People who have been selected to review a particular process or activity may be gathered into a team though they have relatively little interaction with each other. This third type of team, which we call a solutions team, will be selected because of individual expertise or knowledge or a particular interest in an activity. An example of such a team might include people charged with improving the public information processes at the institution. Certainly this group would include the public information practitioners on staff, but it might also include representatives from the alumni office or the alumni association, a faculty member from the journalism department, a media representative from outside the college, and a dean or vice president.

College leadership must be actively supportive of Essentialism or any quality effort. This especially extends to support for the teams created to deal with problems and improve processes. Further, this active support for the teams must be forthcoming from the individual department leader whose staff and associates are on the teams. It is not enough that the college president and vice presidents support the quality effort and the teams created to work on improvement. The directors of alumni relations and admissions and business services —and on and on—must also be actively supportive. This requires extensive communication and coaching by top leadership. And it requires an understanding and acceptance that Essentialism may slay an occasional sacred cow, lay waste to a coveted activity, or contradict prevailing methods.

As we have often said, but which bears reasserting for middle managers, nothing will kill the initiative and enthusiasm of employees given authority to remedy the errors they see daily, improve the work they do, and create a more effective department and institution than managers who do not accept or act upon legitimate, fact-based, consensus-built decisions. In short, if Essentialism is to work, middle managers must relinquish their more traditional controlling and naysaying role. Teams must prevail.

When selecting a team to begin a quality improvement activity and formally practice the techniques of Essentialism, the participants should be chosen for particular skills and attitudes. Several characteristics are important to seek when choosing team participants. Team members should be interested in solving problems. They should be aggressive in their daily behavior when it comes to sorting out the valuable from the valueless. Team members should be selected who will willingly take on the real work involved in process improvement. They should be willing to attend meetings above and beyond their normal tasks and be willing to be active participants in gathering information, developing needed resources, creating necessary liaisons with other parts of the organization, and researching other institutions that may have already successfully dealt with problems being investigated. Active, diligent, and dedicated workers will be most useful to the team and most successful in implementing the tools and techniques of Essentialism.

Team members should have good communication and participation skills and attitudes. Team members must be able to logically and succinctly state their ideas. Perhaps even more important is the ability to actively and effectively listen to others. One's attitude about participation in the group's activities and acceptance of the ideas of other group members will play an important part in the value of an individual to the group. That is, members need to be slow to anger, quick to value the opinions of others, and open to new concepts and different views. Acceptance of particular concepts or beliefs is not necessary, but acceptance that they are offered in good faith is necessary.

A corollary of the above is the ability of a team member to seek and live with consensus as an accepted result of the team's efforts. Consensus is an agreed-upon decision that does not result from voting or from the use of a position of power—nor is it really even compromise. Rather, consensus is "finding a proposal acceptable enough that all members can support it; no member opposes it" (Scholtes, 1992, p. 2-40).

A consensus does not necessarily represent everyone's preferred course of action, nor does it mean everyone is 100 percent satisfied. It does mean that the group has found a course of action that does not generate unwavering opposition and that may achieve some, if not all, of the hoped-for results. It is an acceptable way to begin to solve the identified problem, knowing that additions or modifications can be made in the future. The traditional TQM tools section and the new Essentialism tools section offer methods of working toward consensus.

While each group must have a leader, that leader need not—probably should not—be the "boss." Quite often, a team will be most successful when the boss participates not as an active member, but as a coach. As long as the team and the boss have agreed upon appropriate parameters for the team everyone should feel comfortable with and accept the solutions offered by the team. The leader does not exert decision making control or undue influence on the team's efforts.

The leader of an improvement team is quite often a middle manager appointed by the senior management of the college. As long as middle managers can avoid the traditional traps and usual disruptions of their position and can exhibit the positive qualities of team leaders, they can be successful as group leaders. Often, however, the leader will be someone the group selects, based on its collective knowledge and appreciation of the person's skills. Sometimes, the leader will "self-select," by gathering others with an interest or stake in a sensible solution. Occasionally, an existing committee or functioning team or department will convert from a committee to an improvement team and the current chairperson simply continues as leader, with some modifications in style and participation.

There are many important qualities that the selected leader should exhibit. Leaders function primarily as facilitators, which means they must have effective communication skills, have patience, accept a variety of personal styles and opinions, and be interested in helping the group achieve consensus. The leader cannot be a turf protector or territory grower. The leader cannot dominate discussions or allow others to do so. But the leader must also ensure that the group stays on track, keeps within the boundaries established, and focuses on the assigned task.

Additionally, the team leader must handle the administrative details that go with the team. This includes setting and scheduling meetings, communicating with other appropriate parts of the organization, following up on agreed-upon tasks by team participants, and maintaining minutes, developing agendas, and other similar activities necessary for the smooth functioning of the team.

The group temptation may be to let the superman or superwoman just described take over the entire effort. And some leaders, adept at using authority or used to running things their way, will feel inclined to take charge and "just get it done personally—done alone and done right!" as one colleague remarked. Either of these ways leads to disaster because both neglect the participation and thought of the other team members, who together will make better decisions than anyone alone. The value of the team is to take the best thoughts from those most involved and most informed and come up with the best potential solution, which can then be modified and built upon for further improvements.

The first meeting of the team will naturally include introductions by participants and an explanation by the leader/facilitator of the general cause for the team's creation. Perhaps some ice-breaking activities are appropriate. The next task is to spend the necessary time to identify (or perhaps confirm, depending upon what has happened up to this point) specific goals of the team and the problem to be addressed. These goals should be narrowly focused and simply stated. For instance, the stated goal should not be "to improve public relations" or "to make the campus more useable." Rather, focus on a small, accomplishable goal: "to reduce the number of books returned to publishers by the college bookstore"; or "to minimize the number of overtime hours worked in the print shop"; or "to shorten the approval time for financial aid applications."

Defining the proposed topic in these terms helps concentrate the team's efforts on doable activities. It helps the leader keep the group focused on a single area. It encourages the group to acquire and use data that is not overwhelming. This project statement, the goal of the team, needs to be coupled with other needs and intentions of the team. To begin, the team should discuss what resources might be needed, such as meeting rooms, publications, or computer access. Similarly, the anticipated needs for information should be discussed early on. As we have discussed elsewhere, there are too often too many pieces of information with no real structure—and therefore no real value. The need is to gather information that can help identify root causes and can therefore help execute appropriate actions.

A general time line should also be proposed at this time. How long should it take the team to accomplish its job? How often should the team meet? Are there activities that will slow it down, such as second semester registration? Are activities coming up that require participants to have accomplished something by a particular time?

The team should review its own composition. Should other people be added to the group? And is there an expected need for cooperation from some other part of the college, or from an outside organization, such as a vendor or partnering K-12 system?

The leader needs to let the team know what its authority is. Can the team actually implement changes? How much power, freedom, and responsibility does the group have? What approvals are needed and who needs to be informed? Is the team only to make recommendations? To whom? What responsibilities exist beyond the recommendation? These parameters should be discussed and the team must be fully aware of them from the beginning. Nothing is more disheartening than to believe that a team can and will make a difference and then discover that it can only recommend, and, if the recommendations are denied or buried, nothing else can be done. Teams must be empowered to act.

The actual meetings of the team need to be as action-oriented and "essential" as possible. Avoid the educational bureaucratic problem of believing that meetings are action. Again, we suggest reading the many sources available to help keep groups on track, deal with disrupters and turf protectors, and reach consensus. Our space here is too limited to cover all of the appropriate meeting techniques and skills that could be of help. However, this quick list of important considerations may help keep the team on track.

- Create and distribute an agenda for each meeting, preferably a few days ahead of time. Try to assign time limits, or at least guidelines, for each portion of the agenda.

- Keep meetings relatively short, two hours or so. Unless people must come from extended distances, better results can be achieved with shorter meetings held more often than with longer meetings held less often. By all means, avoid longer meetings at shorter intervals!

- Gather new data and analyze existing data as appropriate. Look for root causes of problems. Remember that opinions are not facts. Seek always to affirm "gut feelings" and anecdotal evidence with hard data. Do not hesitate to question and review all data received from others as part of a formal evaluative process.

- Soliciting possible solutions and then implementing them requires continuous application of the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle. Continue to gather data through the Do stage so there is appropriate information for the Study part.

- Continually seek consensus. Remember that the team is not a committee, where the greatest effort is placed on voting to protect or extend territory. Consensus requires more effort, but the results are more acceptable and implementable.

- Continuously seek feedback. Are the meetings going well?

What are we accomplishing? Does anyone feel left out? Or threatened? Or left behind? Or pushed to the side? Teamwork requires participation by all.

- And, of course, stay focused on the issue. Keep the team on track.

Lastly, the team's individual members must accept responsibility for particular activities—and produce. If asked to research an issue, gather data, or create a questionnaire, participants must have made the commitment to perform: teamwork can be hard work. Assignment of actions and effort should be followed up on aggressively by the leader and the team as a whole.

Remember that it is appropriate to select projects in which there is already a great deal of interest. It's like finding the most exciting game at a soccer tournament—go where the noise is! Always select projects that appear to have real value. Projects that do not add value for internal or external customers, that do not make a real contribution to the mission of the institution, that even if successful will be relatively unnoticed by those involved, should be avoided. As Peter Drucker often recommends, concentrate on things that make a difference.

Be certain that the team deals with a process or, better yet, a part of a process. Attempting to work with an entire system is almost always insurmountably complex. Avoid approaching a project with a solution already in the minds of the team. Prepared responses are quite often wrong and prohibit the effective information gathering that can help discover the root cause of a problem. Avoid approaching a project that involves a process or system already undergoing major revision or that is affected by any other major activity. Work first with the simpler problems. Look for projects that appear to have a beginning and an end. This ensures relatively quick closure, improves morale, and builds momentum for the next project by showing team members that real solutions can be achieved quickly.

Working with recurring activities can also be useful in proving that Essentialism works. When an activity occurs repetitively, it is possible to see changes very quickly. Again, this reinforces for participants and customers that real improvements can be made with minimum fuss and fury. Stick with what is basic and essential, that which enhances the college mission and focuses on customer satisfaction.

Pitfalls

Any improvement process can be threatened by many problems—attitudes, complex relationships, complex situations. To avoid unnecessary difficulty and achieve good results, beware of the pitfalls common to continuous improvement efforts.

First, beware of the desire to demand too much data. Though it is important to gather information from internal and external customers—and vital to base activities on fact, not guesses and intuition—it is equally important not to get caught up in data collection as an end in itself. Organizations often prefer collecting, evaluating, and discussing information at the expense of acting on the information. Avoid inaction. Essentialism is a pragmatic, action-based means of improving quality. Use the information as a tool, not an end in itself.

Continuity of purpose and adherence to quality improvement are absolutes. Do not hop from fad to fad. Both educational management and business management are guilty of running unthinkingly to the fad of the moment. Quality improvement is an ongoing process; it requires consistency and commitment. For instance, reengineering is an in-vogue approach to rejuvenating business and industry. Though there are already several variations of the concept, reengineering generally refers to the complete restructuring and rethinking of the way a service is performed, a function is completed, or a product is made. The intended purpose is to improve the process, thus improve the results and save resources—time, people, money.

Unfortunately, too much of the reengineering we have seen has become too complicated, too costly, and too prolonged to be of real value to institutions with extensive demands on limited resources already draining money, time, and human efforts. In one reported case, a college used up $300,000 from a federal grant, the full time of ten faculty, some of the time of several other faculty and staff, and a year of reengineering activities and training prior to implementing a TQM effort. And when asked for tangible, practical results of the effort, the response was, "We have a new logo and, uh, other stuff." Making continuous improvement too complex is a sure way to guarantee failure, wasted resources, and disappointed staff, faculty, and administrators. Focusing on Essentialism and its pragmatic tools and activities is more realistic, more rewarding, and more timely.

Avoid another common pitfall—too much of anything. By definition, continuous quality improvement in general and Essentialism in particular require unending efforts. We must caution, however, against too much effort, too many teams, too many activities and extended time lines. One result is burnout, as employees and managers find themselves caught up in too much activity. Remember that quality improvement is a process and Essentialism can be implemented in small chunks. That is, we need not demand that everyone be constantly involved in teams with unending goals. The philosophy of Essentialism must pervade the college and the commitment must be strong. But one of the special values of Essentialism is that it can be implemented into the regular work process. Mammoth meetings and protracted discussions are not necessary. Small efforts are quite all right.

The corollary is that any bureaucratic organization—a college included—naturally seeks to formalize, confine, and structure any new activity. That is, Essentialism's simple and pragmatic approach to continuous quality improvement can, unfortunately, be turned into another new bureaucracy. Do not allow this to happen. Always remember the K.I.S.S. rule—keep it short and simple! Essentialism by its intent and basic nature aims for common sense application of tools that work by the people who do the work. Keep focused on those ideas as Essentialism is implemented, to avoid growing just another bureaucratic mess. Failure to do so will inhibit improvements and probably ensure loss of competitive advantage.

> If people are more comfortable doing things the traditional way rather than inventing a better way, if precious time is wasted in countless meetings, if innovative ideas are tied up in the approval process and if creativity is stifled by procedures, your organization will not be competitive in the 1990s (Sonnenberg, 1994, p. 52).

Also beware of unwilling participants. Those who prefer not to change their attitudes and methods can be major impediments to Essentialism. They may be managers, staff, or faculty. And they may resist quality improvement activities for any of several reasons.

> There are those who think that quality is something for the factory; others who think it is just for those institutions that have huge endowments and command the highest tuitions; and perhaps most disturb-

> ing, those who think it is just a fad, without supporting scholarly research, and therefore not appropriate for their institutions (Gore, 1993, p. 356).

Whatever the objections, leadership must effectively and logically argue on behalf of an improvement program. The common sense approach of Essentialism, with its emphasis on results with minimum disruption, is easy to argue. The constant demands of funding sources and the never-ending pressure of competitors offer significant real data to convince the nay-sayers.

Joseph Sensenbrenner underscores one of the difficulties:

> The real opposition was not structural but bureaucratic. There were individual managers who could not tolerate the idea of bringing their employees into decisions or who resented taking time to reassess tried and true procedures. There were employees who scorned the program as faddish and who looked on enthusiastic colleagues as management finks (1991, p. 69).

Beware of throwing college personnel into Essentialism without laying substantial groundwork for the need for quality improvement. Provide leadership—personal commitment, vision, and participation—and build slowly. Train participants—only one or two small groups at first—in the philosophy and tools of Essentialism. Empowerment sounds great, but without training in the use of appropriate tools, it becomes a hollow shell.

> We firmly believe in empowering our people to make decisions, but then they must assume responsibility for their decisions. We realize that it is not enough merely to empower people; our experience shows that people do not always wish to be empowered, either because they are not trained to make decisions or they are afraid of the risks involved. Empowerment must therefore be accompanied by appropriate training (Niven, 1993, p. 28).

And finally, in frankness, every organization probably is encumbered by employees who will be nonparticipants or worse in any improvement effort. We suggest firmness. Coaching and leading are the basics, but at some point it is appropriate to remove people who impede progress. We believe in accountability: that is, real effort in the best interests of the organization.

> Accountability means that jobs will not be created because other people are not doing their jobs. It assumes that people are competent, or if not, they will be given remedial training or will be dealt with appropriately (Cantoni, 1993, p. 33).

Affirmation of this approach comes from David Seymour:

> Causing quality requires a more insistent and persistent approach to change peoples' attitudes and behaviors. By this I mean that assuming responsibility for quality should not be an option. If a person is not willing or able to assume this responsibility, find someone else who will. There is not more room for people who are content to do the minimum. Higher education cannot afford it any longer. The expectation has changed, the bar raised. And the expectation has changed for today, tomorrow, and the day after that. People should be expected to show the kind of initiative and process-improving zeal that is the signature of quality for as long as they work in the organization (1992, p. 102).

Tough talk for education? Yes, it is. And these times demand tough talk, tough action, tough leadership. The cost of inefficiency and incompetency is too high in today's competitive world.

Sometimes we hear that before a quality improvement program can begin, there must be a clear-cut quality philosophy in place, that a cultural change must have taken place in the college or business prior to implementing a CQI or TQM effort. In reality, no cultural change or philosophical revision will occur in and of itself. We can try to demand that our leaders or faculty or staff change their attitudes. We can pronounce our beliefs and attitudes forever, but only action will create the new philosophy. Putting in place and effectively using a quality improvement program that empowers employees, minimizes rework and wasted effort, enhances internal customer relations, and exceeds the expectations of external customers will eventually change the culture of the organization. In short, an institution cannot wait for everyone to be on board; the culture change will come with repeated small successes. The efforts undertaken will create and enhance the environment, not the reverse.

Overall, the ongoing impetus for real change, real commitment to improvement, real support for the suggestions and ideas of employees, must come from college leadership. All of the pitfalls discussed can be largely alleviated by effective leadership.

> Think of an organization as a collection of arrows. If the arrows are generally pointing in one direction, their effect is intensified and the organization begins to move in that direction. Call it synergy or alignment. If as is true in most organizations, the arrows are pointed in somewhat random fashion, the net effect is a lack of motion.
>
> There is no substitute for leadership when it comes to quality. The leader of an organization must cause the arrows to align. No one else can do it. The job cannot be assigned or assumed by someone else. The leadership must build a strong consensus regarding quality and take every opportunity to reinforce that consensus. Quality must be entrenched in the rhetoric of the leadership—in speeches, in vision statements, in organizational goals. Most importantly, the quest for quality must be given meaning through actions (Seymour, 1992, p. 15).

In implementing a quality improvement program, it is important to be aware of the potential pitfalls—the land mines that can sabotage the best of efforts. The careful selection of a doable project and the selection, training, and coaching of team members will go a long way toward avoiding the many pitfalls that can undermine effective, efficient, common sense quality improvement.

We is confronted by insurmountable opportunities (the cartoon character Pogo, quoted in Hartley, 1993, p. 339).

CHAPTER NINE

ESSENTIALISM AND QUALITY

Any college, large or small, with many or few resources, can improve its quality. Better service to customers, more relevant curricula, better-trained faculty and staff, more commitment from leadership—all contribute to the quality of an institution. With the competitive environment in which we work, we can do no less than continuously improve if we are to retain the support of our students, our communities, and our funding entities.

In this book we have demonstrated that continuous quality improvement can be accessible to every college. The guiding principles and basic elements of Essentialism can be incorporated into the ongoing operations of a college. Essentialism is not another add-on program with its own bureaucracy, hierarchies, and reporting structures. Rather, it is a common sense approach to quality improvement. Bringing continuous quality improvement into an organization through Essentialism does not require increased complexity. Complexity does not automatically mean quality; in fact, complexity often prohibits quality. Meeting and exceeding a customer's expectations does not necessarily mean doing more of everything; it quite often means doing less of some things—or doing away completely with long-standing activities, processes, and procedures that have ceased to contribute to constancy of purpose or customer satisfaction.

Every institution needs to regularly reexamine and affirm or modify its mission statement. Constancy of purpose, the first quality principle of Essentialism (and the first of Deming's fourteen points), encourages focus and attention to the core activities of the college.

The second guiding principle of Essentialism, customer satisfaction, is a constant reminder of why we are in business. Without students, learners, customers, there would be no need for colleges, faculty, or administrators. We must train ourselves to be sensitive to the needs of learners and to be proactive in designing and updating curricula.

The three basic elements of Essentialism direct our attention to those customers we serve, whether they be external or internal to the organization. As a basis for our continued existence, credibility, and funding, we must meet the demands and requirements of regulatory and accrediting entities; they are external customers whose needs must be addressed. The first basic element of Essentialism then, is accepting the requirements of regulatory agencies.

The second basic element of Essentialism turns our attention to current customers. These current customers may be traditional eighteen-year-olds seeking an associate degree before transferring to a university, or they may be forty-five-year-old laid-off factory workers seeking retraining to obtain marketable workplace skills. The needs of these current customers must be determined and fulfilled if we are to continue as a quality institution.

The third basic element of Essentialism encourages us to look to the future—to those customers we do not yet have. In order to convert potential customers to current customers we have to prove we have value to add to their personal and professional goals. We have to determine the future needs of the workplace, transfer institutions, and our communities in order to prepare leadership, faculty, and curricula to meet those needs.

With the guiding principles and basic elements of Essentialism firmly in mind, it is possible to examine an institution for its readiness to enter into genuine, systematic quality improvement. Is the college willing to entertain new ideas? Is the college willing to change? Does the college have proactive, visionary leadership? Is it involved in environmental scanning and strategic planning? In short, is the environment stable and capable of supporting genuinely empowered employees? If the answer is yes to most of these questions, then the college is an excellent candidate for a formalized continuous quality improvement initiative.

To create a college culture that values quality and customer satisfaction as priorities, participants need some basic training. They should understand the need for quality improvement and they should have basic tools with which to address quality improvement projects. They need to know how to work as a team, how to select projects, and how to evaluate their success. Other than a basic awareness of the concepts of continuous quality improvement, the training need not involve everyone immediately, nor does it need to be extensive and intensive. Rather, it should be just-in-time training that teaches skills and tools that participants will immediately practice and use to solve problems and make a difference in the workplace. One of the more common complaints regarding traditional TQM is its lack of timely results. Essentialism, properly applied, will produce noticeable results in a short period of time. Real improvements, though often small and incremental, are significant in converting those who may hope continuous quality improvement is just another management fad that will blow over soon enough! If we are to stay in business and serve the communities that support us, we must be committed to continuous quality improvement as a way of life, a part of the culture of the college. It is much more than the latest management fad.

Essentialism, then, requires us to pay attention to what is basic and indispensable to our colleges. Essentialism provides the means to achieve specific, quantifiable, valuable rewards as part of a process to improve an organization. The benefits of Essentialism are substantial. Costs are minimized. Time and human resources are conserved. Employee morale is improved. The TQM message gets through, but the bureaucracy of TQM does not. The college saves time, energy, and effort in many areas of daily activities, while improving quality through better focus, less wasted effort, maximum concern with only those things that really matter. The pursuit of quality becomes an adventure rather than a burden.

Essentialism goes to the heart of the college and its daily operations. It provides a conceptual framework; specific, user-friendly tools; and straightforward implementation. It is results oriented, and progress is quickly evident. Employees are empowered, the institution is strengthened, and the quality orientation becomes highly visible. Essentialism is practical, viable, significant, and accessible quality improvement. Essentialism is common sense quality improvement.

Appendix: The Survey Instrument

In January 1994 the authors sent 587 surveys to American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) member colleges. The surveys, reproduced on the following pages, were returned by 209 colleges, a 35.6 percent return rate. We intentionally made the survey quick and easy to complete. We believe this is partially responsible for the exceptional return. But perhaps a stronger reason for the high return rate is the extraordinary interest in quality improvement concepts and practices that currently pervades our colleges.

The survey has provided confirmation of the authors' view that TQM as currently practiced is too involved and too costly for most small colleges to successfully implement. In addition to the quantifiable data we requested, the written comments by the respondents were of great value. Both the quantitative data and the open-ended responses encouraged us to further develop Essentialism and heightened our understanding of the needs of colleges with limited resources but a strong desire to develop a quality improvement program.

The survey results are noted question by question, with comments as appropriate in the following pages. Note that the totals may not equal 100 percent of the respondents due to unanswered questions, multiple responses to a single question, etc.

1. Is your college involved in a formal Total Quality Management/Continuous Quality Improvement program?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Almost two thirds (58 percent) of the responding colleges are not involved in a formal quality improvement program. Though business and industry since the early 1980s, and colleges and universities since the late 1980s, have been using quality programs extensively, the participation rate of community colleges is still relatively low.

2. If no, skip to #14. If yes, are you still involved in the program?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Of the forty-four respondents answering this question, all but three are still involved in the quality program.

3. How long has your college been involved in a quality improvement program?

Less than 1 year ☐ *(28)* 1-3 years ☐ *(30)* 4 or more years ☐ *(5)*

Most colleges with a program are relative newcomers. Only a handful have more than four years of experience. A large portion have only just begun.

4. Who in your organization has received formal training? (Check all that apply.)

1. Senior Administration ☐ *(47)* 2. Mid Level Administration ☐ *(47)*
3. Faculty ☐ *(46)* 4. Support Staff ☐ *(40)*

The following table shows number of responses for combinations of the four categories or for single responses:

Categories Checked	*Responses*
1,2,3,4	*37*
1,2,3	*6*
1,2	*2*
1	*2*
2,3,4	*2*
3,4	*1*

All other single categories and combinations received no responses.

Almost all colleges participating in a quality program have offered training to most of their college community, with thirty-seven offering training to all four categories of employees. Of the fifty colleges who answered this question only two have offered quality training to one group only, at least at the time of the survey.

5. Approximately how many hours of training has each group received? (Please check box which applies.)

	5 OR LESS	6 - 10	11 - 25	OVER 26
SENIOR ADMIN	*(0)*	*(3)*	*(2)*	*(7)*
MID-LEVEL ADMIN	*(8)*	*(21)*	*(13)*	*(18)*
FACULTY	*(8)*	*(11)*	*(8)*	*(11)*
SUPPORT STAFF	*(10)*	*(8)*	*(10)*	*(9)*
OTHERS				

While this question was not responded to as consistently as some of the other questions, the responses here indicate that for participating colleges the greatest training efforts have been made with mid-level administrators. Inasmuch as most projects will require the participation and active support of this group to be successful, the effort is probably well spent.

6. Have formal quality improvement teams been formed at your college?

Yes ☐ *(47)* No ☐ *(22)*

A large portion of the respondents who are involved in a formal quality improvement program have formed teams. The next four questions deal with the details of this activity.

7. If yes, what was your first project?

____

____

____

The range of projects was very wide, with most concentration on processes that affect internal customers.

8. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "not successful" to 5 being "very successful", how successful was your first project? (Please circle one).

Not successful	1	2	3	4	5	Very successful
	(0)	*(4)*	*(11)*	*(16)*	*(10)*	

Most respondents indicated satisfaction with the success of the first project undertaken. However, one fourth of the respondents found the results fairly unsatisfactory (response 3), and 10 percent found the results rather unsuccessful (response 2).

9. How many projects are currently underway?

One ☐ *(12)*	2-4 ☐ *(19)*	5-10 ☐ *(15)*	11 or more ☐ *(2)*

Most responding colleges are participating in more than one quality improvement project, indicating a desire to actively implement improvement programs. The problematic question, of course, is whether there are definable successes resulting from the projects.

10. Which groups are represented in those teams? (Check all that apply.)

1. Senior Admin ☐ *(38)*	2. Mid Level Admin ☐ *(46)*
3. Faculty ☐ *(43)*	4. Support Staff ☐ *(42)*
5. Students ☐ *(18)*	

Categories Checked	*Number of Responses*
1,2,3,4,5	*15*
1,2,3,4	*21*
1,2	*2*
2,3,4,5	*2*
2,3,4	*3*
2,3	*1*
2	*2*
3,4,5	*1*

All other combinations were unselected.

Perhaps most surprising here is the large number of respondents who included students.

11. Have you used outside consultants in your Quality Improvement program?

Yes ☐ *(46)* No ☐ *(22)*

Two-thirds of the colleges used an outside consultant. In our experience, very few institutions attempt a quality improvement program without some outside assistance.

12. Approximately what percentage of each group actively participates in formal Quality Improvement programs? (Please check each box that applies)

	LESS THAN 5%	6 - 25%	26 - 50%	MORE THAN 51%
SENIOR ADMIN	*(5)*	*(12)*	*(9)*	*(29)*
MID-LEVEL ADMIN	*(5)*	*(13)*	*(14)*	*(26)*
FACULTY	*(9)*	*(22)*	*(12)*	*(10)*
SUPPORT STAFF	*(9)*	*(24)*	*(10)*	*(11)*
OTHERS	*(5)*	*(1)*	*(0)*	*(4)*

The responses to this question indicate that in many responding colleges, most employees are not actively involved in quality improvement programs.

13. What do you consider the most serious obstacles to your continuing with your program? (Check all that apply.)

1. Commitment of senior management ☐ *(7)* 2. Time ☐ *(51)*
3. Costs ☐ *(21)* 4. Union/labor/contract concerns ☐ *(4)*
5. Other (explain)____________________________

Categories Checked	*Number of Responses*
1,2,3	*2*
1,2	*4*
2,3,4	*1*
2,3,	*16*
2	*26*

3	*1*
4	*1*
1,3	*1*
2,4	*2*

Other combinations were not selected, and no one checked all four boxes.

Time is the great obstacle to the respondents, with cost a prominent second. The complaints and concerns that are regularly heard by the authors are confirmed in these replies.

SKIP TO #16

The following questions were answered only by those respondents who said they were not involved currently in a TQM/CQI program.

14. Are you considering adopting a formal Quality Improvement program?
Yes ☐ *(94)* No ☐ *(62)*

Sixty percent of responding colleges are thinking of adopting a quality improvement plan, but, conversely, 40 percent are not considering it. The reasons cited in the next question may partially explain why so many colleges are not planning a formal quality improvement plan.

15. If you are considering adopting a program, what do you see as the most serious obstacles? (Check all that apply).

1. Commitment of senior management ☐ *(27)* 2. Time ☐ *(82)*
3. Costs ☐ *(62)* 4. Union/labor/contract concerns ☐ *(6)*
5. Other (explain) ______________________________

Categories Checked	*Number of Responses*
1,2,3,4	*2*
1,2,3	*11*

1,2	*5*
1	*6*
2,3,4	*1*
2,3	*40*
2	*23*
3,4	*1*
3	*4*
4	*2*
1,3	*3*

Again, for those considering but not yet involved, costs and time are the major obstacles, just as they are the most serious problems for those already involved in a quality improvement program.

16. What is your opinion of TQM/CQI programs? Challenges? Benefits? Drawbacks?

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Representative comments from the colleges include:

"I agree with your assessment that many TQM models are overly complex for small colleges."
Anonymous

"If colleges do not steadily improve their quality and then their productivity, they may not survive."
Jay L. Fennell, President
Clinton Community College, New York

"From my exposure the programs are good if the institution is ready and truly committed. They are not 'quick and easy.' If poorly done, the institution will be worse off for having tried."
Donald M. Claycomb, President
Linn Technical College, Missouri

"Small institutions with lean administrative groups have everyone doing double or triple duty as it is. Freeing people for training is difficult, particularly when the expectation is that we will train as a

group. We see the many values of a TQM-type cooperative problem-solving approach but need to phase into it rather than use an immersion method. We also already use many of the participative techniques related to TQM, but need some help in finding that umbrella that brings them together into a cohesive whole of some kind."

Kent Farnsworth, President
Crowder College, Missouri

"I agree that TQM as it is currently marketed is too costly, too complex, and too time consuming for most small community colleges. We are planning a 'pared-down' version. We would like to have the full program, but it's beyond our resources."

Clifton W. Paderi, President
Sampson Community College, North Carolina

"I believe the TQM/CQI process is a reasonable method for increasing knowledge and fostering institutional improvement. The drawbacks of such a program are the time and resources necessary to initiate and maintain it."

Donald C. Burns, President
Montcalm Community College, Michigan

These responses are indicative of the comments included on the returned surveys. The comments and the data further validated our belief that a simpler, less costly, more effective means of developing a quality improvement program at a community college was needed.

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